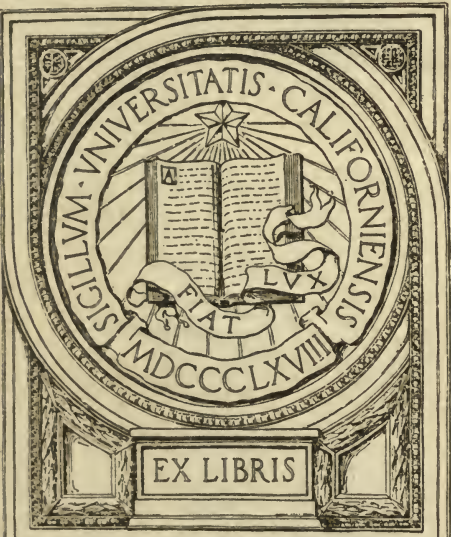
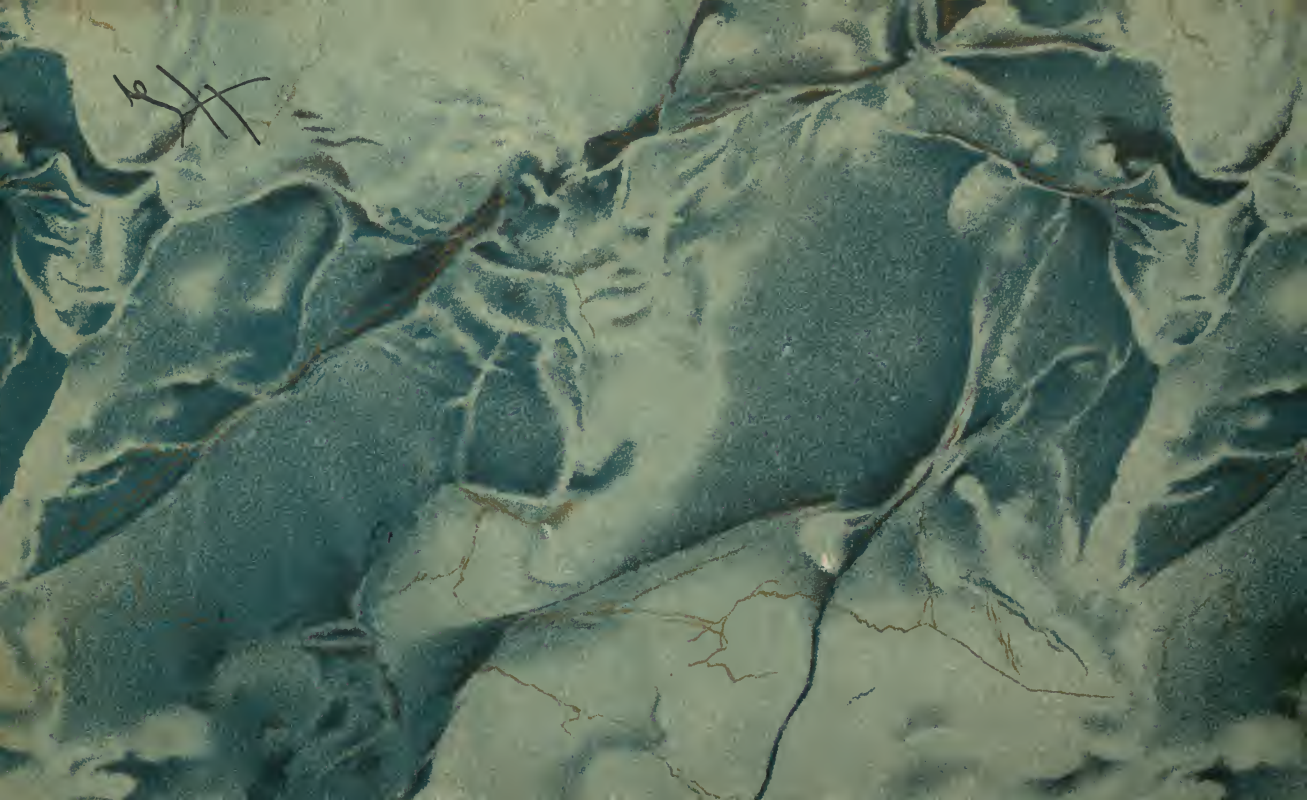
UC-NRLF
B 3 322 602

GIFT OF
MICHAEL REESE



EX LIBRIS

155
H347
1960
v.6



BRET HARTE'S WORKS.

LIBRARY EDITION, in Six Vols. crown 8vo, cloth extra, 6s. each.

BRET HARTE'S COLLECTED WORKS. LIBRARY EDITION. Arranged and Revised by the Author.

Vol. I. COMPLETE POETICAL AND DRAMATIC WORKS. With Steel Portrait, and Introduction by Author.

Vol. II. EARLIER PAPERS—LUCK OF ROARING CAMP, and other Sketches—BOHEMIAN PAPERS—SPANISH AND AMERICAN LEGENDS.

Vol. III. TALES OF THE ARGONAUTS—EASTERN SKETCHES.

Vol. IV. GABRIEL CONROY.

Vol. V. STORIES—CONDENSED NOVELS, &c.

Vol. VI.—TALES OF THE PACIFIC SLOPE.

*** A SEVENTH VOLUME is in preparation.

THE SELECT WORKS OF BRET HARTE, in Prose and Poetry. With Introductory Essay by J. M. BELLEW, Portrait of the Author, and 50 Illustrations. Crown 8vo, cloth extra, 7s. 6d.

BRET HARTE'S COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS. Author's Copyright Edition. Printed on hand-made paper, and bound in buckram. Crown 8vo, 4s. 6d.

THE QUEEN OF THE PIRATE ISLE. With 28 Original Drawings by KATE GREENAWAY, reproduced in Colours by EDMUND EVANS. Small 4to, boards, 5s.

Crown 8vo, cloth extra, 3s. 6d. each.

A WAIF OF THE PLAINS. With 60 Illustrations by STANLEY L. WOOD.

THE WARD OF THE GOLDEN GATE. With 60 Illustrations by STANLEY L. WOOD.

Post 8vo, illustrated boards, 2s. each.

GABRIEL CONROY.

AN HEIRESS OF RED DOG, &c.

THE LUCK OF ROARING CAMP, and other Sketches.

CALIFORNIAN STORIES (including THE TWINS OF TABLE MOUNTAIN, JEFF BRIGGS'S LOVE STORY, &c.)

Post 8vo, illustrated boards, 2s. each; cloth, 2s. 6d. each.

FLIP.

MARUJA.

A PHYLLIS OF THE SIERRAS.

Fcap. 8vo, picture cover, 1s. each.

THE TWINS OF TABLE MOUNTAIN.

JEFF BRIGGS'S LOVE STORY.

LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY.

TALES OF THE PACIFIC SLOPE.

Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

THE COMPLETE WORKS

OF

BRET HARTE

COLLECTED AND REVISED BY THE AUTHOR

VOL. VI.

TALES OF THE PACIFIC SLOPE

REESE LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF
CALIFORNIA.

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1890

[*All rights reserved*]

955
.H327
1880
v.6

44687

PS
1820
E80
1880
v.6
MAIN

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
FLIP	3
MARUJA	52
A WAIF OF THE PLAINS	181
A PHYLLIS OF THE SIERRAS	291
FOUND AT BLAZING STAR	380
A DRIFT FROM REDWOOD CAMP	419
A GENTLEMAN OF LA PORTE	442

456

TALES OF THE PACIFIC SLOPE.

REESE LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.

Flip.

CHAPTER I.

Just where the red track of the *Los Gatos* road streams on and upward, like the sinuous trail of a fiery rocket, until it is extinguished in the blue shadows of the coast range, there is an embayed terrace near the summit hedged by dwarf firs. At every bend of the heat-laden road the eye rests upon it wistfully; all along the flank of the mountain, which seemed to pant and quiver in the oven-like air; through rising dust, the slow creaking of dragging wheels, the monotonous cry of tired springs and the muffled beat of plunging hoofs, it held out a promise of sheltered coolness and green silences beyond. Sunburned and anxious faces yearned towards it from the dizzy, swaying tops of stage-coaches, from lagging teams far below, from the blinding white canvas covers of "mountain schooners," and from scorching saddles that seemed to weigh down the scrambling, sweating animals beneath. But it would seem that the hope was vain, the promise illusive. When the terrace was reached it appeared not only to have caught and gathered all the heat of the valley below, but to have evolved a fire of its own from some hidden crater-like source unknown. Nevertheless, instead of prostrating and enervating man and beast, it was said to have induced the wildest exaltation. The heated air was filled and stifling with resinous exhalations. The delirious spices of balm, bay, spruce, juniper, *yerba buena*, wild syringa, and strange aromatic herbs as yet unclassified, distilled and evaporated

in that mighty heat, seemed to fire with a midsummer madness all who breathed their fumes. They stung, smarted, stimulated, intoxicated. It was said that the most jaded and footsore horses became furious and ungovernable under their influence; wearied teamsters and muleteers, who had exhausted their profanity in the ascent, drank fresh draughts of inspiration in this fiery air, extended their vocabulary, and created new and startling forms of objurgation. It is recorded that one bibulous stage-driver exhausted description and condensed its virtues in a single phrase—"Gin and Ginger." This felicitous epithet, flung out in a generous comparison with his favourite drink, "Rum and Gum," clung to it ever after.

Such was the current comment on this vale of spices. Like most human criticism, it was hasty and superficial. No one yet had been known to have penetrated deeply its mysterious recesses. It was still far below the summit and its wayside inn. It had escaped the intruding foot of hunter and prospector, and the inquisitive patrol of the County Surveyor had only skirted its boundary. It remained for Mr. Lance Harriott to complete its exploration. His reasons for so doing were simple. He had made the journey thither underneath the stage-coach and clinging to its axle. He had chosen this hazardous mode of conveyance at night as the coach crept by his place of concealment in the wayside brush, to elude the Sheriff of Monterey County and his *posse*, who were after him. He had not made himself known to his fellow-passengers, as they already knew him as a gambler, an outlaw, and a desperado; he deemed it unwise to present himself in his newer reputation of a man who had just slain a brother-gambler in a quarrel, and for whom a reward was offered. He slipped from the axle as the stage-coach swirled past the brushing branches of fir, and for an instant lay unnoticed, a scarcely-distinguishable mound of dust in the broken furrows of the road. Then, more like a beast than man, he crept on his hands

and knees into the steaming underbrush. Here he lay still, until the clatter of harness and the sound of voices faded in the distance. Had he been followed it would have been difficult to detect in that inert mass of rags any semblance to a known form or figure. A hideous reddish mask of dust and clay obliterated his face; his hands were shapeless stumps exaggerated in his trailing sleeves. And when he rose, staggering like a drunken man, and plunged wildly into the recesses of the wood, a cloud of dust followed him, and pieces and patches of his frayed and rotten garments clung to the impeding branches. Twice he fell, but, maddened and upheld by the smarting spices and stimulating aroma of the air, he kept on his course.

Gradually the heat became less oppressive; once when he stopped and leaned exhaustedly against a sapling, he fancied he saw the zephyr he could not yet feel in the glittering and trembling of leaves in the distance before him. Again the deep stillness was moved with a faint sighing rustle, and he knew he must be nearing the edge of the thicket. The spell of silence thus broken was followed by a fainter, more musical interruption—the glassy tinkle of water! A step farther his foot trembled on the verge of a slight ravine still closely canopied by the interlacing boughs overhead. A tiny stream that he could have dammed with his hand yet lingered in this parched red gash in the hillside and trickled into a deep, irregular, well-like cavity, that again overflowed and sent its light surplus on. It had been the luxurious retreat of many a spotted trout; it was to be the bath of Lance Harriott. Without a moment's hesitation, without removing a single garment, he slipped cautiously into it, as if fearful of losing a single drop. His head disappeared from the level of the bank; the solitude was again unbroken. Only two objects remained upon the edge of the ravine—his revolver and tobacco-pouch.

A few minutes elapsed. A fearless blue jay alighted on the bank and made a prospecting peck at the tobacco-pouch.

It yielded in favour of a gopher, who endeavoured to draw it towards his hole, but in turn gave way to a red squirrel, whose attention was divided, however, between the pouch and the revolver, which he regarded with mischievous fascination. Then there was a splash, a grunt, a sudden dispersion of animated nature, and the head of Mr. Lance Harriott appeared above the bank. It was a startling transformation. Not only that he had, by this wholesale process, washed himself and his light "drill" garments entirely clean, but that he had, apparently by the same operation, morally cleansed *himself*, and left every stain and ugly blot of his late misdeeds and reputation in his bath. His face, albeit scratched here and there, was rosy, round, shining with irrepressible good-humour and youthful levity. His large blue eyes were infantine in their innocent surprise and thoughtlessness. Dripping yet with water, and panting, he rested his elbows lazily on the bank, and became instantly absorbed with a boy's delight in the movements of the gopher, who after the first alarm returned cautiously to abduct the tobacco-pouch. If any familiar had failed to detect Lance Harriott in his hideous masquerade of dust and grime and tatters, still less would any passing stranger have recognised in this blonde faun the possible outcast and murderer. And when with a swirl of his spattering sleeve he drove back the gopher in a shower of spray, and leaped to the bank, he seemed to have accepted his felonious hiding-place as a mere picnicking bower.

A slight breeze was unmistakedly permeating the wood from the west. Looking in that direction, Lance imagined that the shadow was less dark, and although the undergrowth was denser, he struck off carelessly towards it. As he went on, the wood became lighter and lighter; branches, and presently leaves, were painted against the vivid blue of the sky. He knew he must be near the summit, stopped, felt for his revolver, and then lightly put the few remaining branches aside.

The full glare of the noonday sun at first blinded him. When he could see more clearly he found himself on the open western slope of the mountain, which in the coast range was seldom wooded. The spiced thicket stretched between him and the summit, and again between him and the stage-road that plunged from the terrace like forked lightning into the valley below. He could command all the approaches without being seen. Not that this seemed to occupy his thoughts or cause him any anxiety. His first act was to disencumber himself of his tattered coat; he then filled and lighted his pipe, and stretched himself full-length on the open hillside, as if to bleach in the fierce sun. While smoking he carelessly perused the fragment of a newspaper which had enveloped his tobacco, and being struck with some amusing paragraph, read it half aloud again to some imaginary auditor, emphasising its humour with a hilarious slap upon his leg.

Possibly from the relaxation of fatigue and the bath, which had become a vapour one as he alternately rolled and dried himself in the baking grass, his eyes closed dreamily. He was awakened by the sound of voices. They were distant, they were vague, they approached no nearer. He rolled himself to the verge of the first precipitous grassy descent. There was another bank or plateau below him, and then a confused depth of olive shadows, pierced here and there by the spiked helmets of pines. There was no trace of habitation. Yet the voices were those of some monotonous occupation, and Lance distinctly heard through them the click of crockery and the ring of some household utensil. It appeared to be the interjectional, half listless, half perfunctory domestic dialogue of an old man and a girl, of which the words were unintelligible. Their voices indicated the solitude of the mountain but without sadness, they were mysterious without being awe-inspiring, they might have uttered the dreariest commonplaces, but in their vast isolation they seemed musical and

eloquent. Lance drew his first sigh—they had suggested dinner.

Careless as his nature was, he was too cautious to risk detection in broad daylight. He contented himself for the present with endeavouring to locate that particular part of the depths from which the voices seemed to rise. It was more difficult, however, to select some other way of penetrating it than by the stage-road. "They're bound to have a fire or show a light when it's dark," he reasoned, and satisfied with that reflection, lay down again. Presently he began to amuse himself by tossing some silver coins in the air. Then his attention was directed to a spur of the coast range which had been sharply silhouetted against the cloudless western sky. Something intensely white, something so small that it was scarcely larger than the silver coin he held in his hand, was appearing in a slight cleft of the range.

While he looked it gradually filled and obliterated the cleft. In another moment the whole serrated line of mountain had disappeared. The dense, dazzling, white, encompassing host began to pour over and down every ravine and pass of the coast. Lance recognised the sea-fog, and knew that scarcely twenty miles away lay the ocean—and safety! The drooping sun was now caught and hidden in its soft embraces. A sudden chill breathed over the mountain. He shivered, rose, and plunged again for very warmth into the spice-laden thicket. The heated balsamic air began to affect him like a powerful sedative; his hunger was forgotten in the languor of fatigue; he slumbered. When he awoke it was dark. He groped his way through the thicket. A few stars were shining directly above him, but beyond and below everything was lost in the soft, white, fleecy veil of fog. Whatever light or fire might have betokened human habitation was hidden. To have pushed on blindly was madness; he could only wait for morning. It suited the outcast's lazy philosophy; he crept back again to his bed in the hollow and slept. In that profound

silence and shadow, shut out from human association and sympathy by the ghostly fog, what torturing visions conjured up by remorse and fear should have pursued him? what spirit passed before him or slowly shaped itself out of the infinite blackness of the wood? None. As he slipped gently into that blackness he remembered with a slight regret some biscuits that were dropped from the coach by a careless luncheon-consuming passenger. That pang over, he slept as sweetly, as profoundly, as divinely as a child.

CHAPTER II.

He awoke with the aroma of the woods still steeping his senses. His first instinct was that of all young animals; he seized a few of the young, tender green leaves of the *yerba buena* vine that crept over his mossy pillow and ate them, being rewarded by a half berry-like flavour that seemed to soothe the cravings of his appetite. The languor of sleep being still upon him, he lazily watched the quivering of a sunbeam that was caught in the canopying boughs above. Then he dozed again. Hovering between sleeping and waking, he became conscious of a slight movement among the dead leaves on the bank beside the hollow in which he lay. The movement appeared to be intelligent, and directed towards his revolver, which glittered on the bank. Amused at this evident return of his larcenous friend of the previous day, he lay perfectly still. The movement and rustle continued, but it now seemed long and undulating. Lance's eyes suddenly became set; he was intensely, keenly awake. It was not a snake, but the hand of a human arm half hidden in the moss, groping for the weapon. In that flash of perception he saw that it was small, bare, and deeply freckled. In an instant he grasped it firmly, and rose to his feet, dragging to his own level as he did so the struggling figure of a young girl.

"Leave me go," she said, more ashamed than frightened.

Lance looked at her. She was scarcely more than fifteen, slight and lithe, with a boyish flatness of breast and back. Her flushed face and bare throat were absolutely peppered with minute brown freckles, like grains of spent gunpowder. Her eyes, which were large and grey, presented the singular spectacle of being also freckled—at least they were shot through in pupil and cornea with tiny spots like powdered allspice. Her hair was even more remarkable in its tawny, deer-skin colour, full of lighter shades, and bleached to the faintest of blondes on the crown of her head, as if by the action of the sun. She had evidently outgrown her dress, which was made for a smaller child, and the too brief skirt disclosed a bare, freckled, and sandy desert of shapely limb, for which the darned stockings were equally too scant. Lance let his grasp slip from her thin wrist to her hand, and then with a good-humoured gesture tossed it lightly back to her.

She did not retreat, but continued looking at him in half-surly embarrassment.

"I ain't a bit frightened," she said. "I'm not going to run away—don't you fear."

"Glad to hear it," said Lance, with unmistakable satisfaction; "but why did you go for my revolver?"

She flushed again, and was silent. Presently she began to kick the earth at the roots of the tree, and said, as if confidentially to her foot, "I wanted to get hold of it before you did."

"You did! and why?"

"Oh, you know why."

Every tooth in Lance's head showed that he did perfectly. But he was discreetly silent.

"I didn't know what you were hiding there for," she went on, still addressing the tree, "and," looking at him sideways under her white lashes, "I didn't see your face."

This subtle compliment was the first suggestion of her artful sex. It actually sent the blood into the careless rascal's face, and for a moment confused him. He coughed. "So you thought you'd freeze on to that six-shooter of mine until you saw my hand?"

She nodded. Then she picked up a broken hazel branch, fitted it into the small of her back, threw her tanned bare arms over the ends of it, and expanded her chest and her biceps at the same moment. This simple action was supposed to convey an impression at once of ease and muscular force.

"Perhaps you'd like to take it now," said Lance, handing her the pistol.

"I've seen six-shooters before now," said the girl, cleverly evading the proffered weapon and its suggestions. "Dad has one, and my brother had two derringers before he was half as big as me."

She stopped to observe in her companion the effect of this capacity of her family to bear arms. Lance only regarded her amusedly. Presently she again spoke abruptly—

"What made you eat that grass just now?"

"Grass!" echoed Lance.

"Yes, there," pointing to the *yerba buena.*

Lance laughed. "I was hungry. Look," he said, gaily tossing some silver into the air. "Do you think you could get me some breakfast for that, and have enough left to buy something for yourself?"

The girl eyed the money and the man with half-bashful curiosity.

"I reckon Dad might give ye suthing if he had a mind ter, though ez a rule he's down on tramps ever since they run off his chickens. Ye might try."

"But I want *you* to try. You can bring it to me here."

The girl retreated a step, dropped her eyes, and with a smile that was a charming hesitation between bashfulness and impudence, said—"So you *are* hidin', are ye?"

"That's just it. Your head's level. I am," laughed Lance unconcernedly.

"Yur ain't one o' the M'Carty gang—are ye?"

Mr. Lance Harriott felt a momentary moral exaltation in declaring truthfully that he was not one of a notorious band of mountain freebooters known in the district under that name.

"Nor ye ain't one of them chicken-lifters that raided Henderson's ranch? We don't go much on that kind o' cattle yer."

"No," said Lance cheerfully.

"Nor ye ain't that chap ez beat his wife unto death at Santa Clara?"

Lance honestly scorned the imputation. Such conjugal ill-treatment as he had indulged in had not been physical, and had been with other men's wives.

There was a moment's further hesitation on the part of the girl. Then she said shortly—

"Well, then, I reckon you kin come along with me."

"Where?" asked Lance.

"To the ranch," she replied simply.

"Then you won't bring me anything to eat here?"

"What for? You kin get it down there." Lance hesitated. "I tell you it's all right," continued the girl, "I'll make it all right with Dad."

"But suppose I reckon I'd rather stay here," persisted Lance, with a perfect consciousness, however, of affectation in his caution.

"Stay away, then," said the girl coolly; "only as Dad perempted this yer woods"——

"*Pre*-empted," suggested Lance.

"Per-empted or prem-emp-ted, as you like," continued the girl scornfully, "ez he's got a holt on this yer woods, ye might ez well see him down thar ez here. For here he's like to come any minit. You can bet your life on that."

She must have read Lance's amusement in his eyes, for

she again dropped her own, with a frown of brusque embarrassment. "Come along, then; I'm your man," said Lance gaily, extending his hand.

She would not accept it, eyeing it, however, furtively, like a horse about to shy. "Hand me your pistol first," she said.

He handed it to her with an assumption of gaiety. She received it on her part with unfeigned seriousness, and threw it over her shoulder like a gun. This combined action of the child and heroine, it is quite unnecessary to say, afforded Lance undiluted joy.

"You go first," she said.

Lance stepped promptly out, with a broad grin. "Looks kinder as if I was a prisoner, don't it?" he suggested.

"Go on, and don't fool," she replied.

The two fared onward through the wood. For one wild moment he entertained the facetious idea of appearing to rush frantically away, "just to see what the girl would do," but abandoned it. "It's an even thing if she wouldn't spot me the first pop," he reflected admiringly.

When they had reached the open hillside Lance stopped inquiringly. "This way," she said, pointing toward the summit, and in quite an opposite direction to the valley where he had heard the voices, one of which he now recognised as hers. They skirted the thicket for a few moments, and then turned sharply into a trail which began to dip towards a ravine leading to the valley. "Why do you have to go all the way round?" he asked.

"*We* don't," the girl replied with an emphasis; "there's a shorter cut."

"Where?"

"That's telling," she answered shortly.

"What's your name?" asked Lance, after a steep scramble and a drop into the ravine.

"Flip."

"What?"

"Flip."

"I mean your first name—your front name."

"Flip."

"Flip! Oh, short for Felipa?"

"It ain't Flipper—it's Flip." And she relapsed into silence.

"You don't ask me mine?" suggested Lance.

She did not vouchsafe a reply.

"Then you don't want to know?"

"Maybe Dad will. You can lie to *him*."

This direct answer apparently sustained the agreeable homicide for some moments. He moved onward, silently exuding admiration. "Only," added Flip, with a sudden caution, "you'ld better agree with me."

The trail here turned away abruptly and re-entered the cañon. Lance looked up and noticed they were almost directly beneath the bay thicket and the plateau that towered far above them. The trail here showed signs of clearing, and the way was marked by felled trees and stumps of pines.

"What does your father do here?" he finally asked. Flip remained silent, swinging the revolver in her hand. Lance repeated his question.

"Burns charcoal and makes diamonds," said Flip, looking at him out of the corners of her eyes.

"Makes diamonds?" echoed Lance.

Flipp nodded her head.

"Many of 'em?" he continued carelessly.

"Lots. But they're not big," she returned with a side-long glance.

"Oh, they're not big, then," said Lance gravely.

They had by this time reached a small staked enclosure, whence the sudden fluttering and cackle of poultry welcomed the return of the evident mistress of this sylvan retreat. It was scarcely imposing. Farther on, a cooking stove under a tree, a saddle and bridle, a few household implements scattered about, indicated the "ranch." Like most

pioneer clearings, it was simply a disorganised raid upon Nature that had left behind a desolate battlefield strewn with waste and decay. The fallen trees, the crushed thicket, the splintered limbs, the rudely torn-up soil, were made hideous by their grotesque juxtaposition with the wrecked fragments of civilisation, in empty cans, broken bottles, battered hats, soleless boots, frayed stockings, cast-off rags, and the crowning absurdity of the twisted wire skeleton of a hooped skirt hanging from a branch. The wildest defile, the densest thicket, the most virgin solitude was less dreary and forlorn than this first footprint of man. The only redeeming feature of this prolonged bivouac was the cabin itself. Built of the half-cylindrical strips of pine bark, and thatched with the same material, it had a certain picturesque rusticity. But this was an accident of economy rather than taste, for which Flip apologised by saying that the bark of the pine was "no good" for charcoal.

"I reckon Dad's in the woods," she added, pausing before the open door of the cabin. "O Dad!" Her voice, clear and high, seemed to fill the whole long cañon, and echoed from the green plateau above. The monotonous strokes of an axe were suddenly pretermitted, and somewhere from the depths of the close-set pines a returning voice answered "Flip." There was a pause of a few moments, with some muttering, stumbling, and crackling in the underbrush, and then the sudden appearance of "Dad."

Had Lance first met him in the thicket he would have been puzzled to assign his race to Mongolian, Indian, or Ethiopian origin. Perfunctory but incomplete washings of his hands and face, after charcoal burning, had gradually ground into his skin a greyish slate-pencil pallor, grotesquely relieved at the edges where the washing had left off with a border of a darker colour. He looked like an over-worked Christy Minstrel with the briefest of intervals between his performances. There were black rims in the orbits of his eyes, as if he gazed feebly out of unglazed spectacles, which

heightened his simian resemblance, already grotesquely exaggerated by what appeared to be repeated and spasmodic experiments in dying his grey hair. Without the slightest notice of Lance, he inflicted his protesting and querulous presence entirely on his daughter.

"Well! what's up now? Yer ye are calling me from work an hour before noon. Dog my skin—ef I ever get fairly limbered up afore it's 'Dad!' and 'O Dad!'"

To Lance's intense satisfaction the girl received this harangue with an air of supreme indifference, and when "Dad" had finally relapsed into an unintelligible, and, as it seemed to Lance, a half-frightened muttering, she said coolly—

"Ye'd better drop that axe and scoot round gettin' this stranger some breakfast and some grub to take with him. He's one of them San Francisco sports out here trout-fishing in the Branch. He's got adrift from his party, has lost his rod and fixins, and had to camp out last night in the Gin and Ginger Woods."

"That's just it; it's allers suthin like that," screamed the old man, dashing his fist on his leg in a feeble, impotent passion, but without looking at Lance. "Why in blazes don't he go up to that there blamed hotel on the summit? Why in thunder?"—— But here he caught his daughter's large freckled eyes full in his own. He blinked feebly, his voice fell into a tone of whining entreaty. "Now, look yer, Flip, it's playing it rather low down on the old man, this yer running in o' tramps, and desarted emigrants, and cast-ashore sailors, and forlorn widders, and ravin' lunatics on this yer ranch. I put it to you, Mister," he said abruptly, turning to Lance for the first time, but as if he had already taken an active part in the conversation—"I put it as a gentleman yourself, and a far-minded sportin' man, if this is the square thing?"

Before Lance could reply, Flip had already began. "That's just it! D'ye reckon, being a sportin' man and

an A1 feller, he's goin' to waltz down inter that hotel, rigged out ez he is? D'ye reckon he's goin' to let his partners get the laugh outer him? Do ye reckon he's goin' to show his head outer this yer ranch till he can do it square? Not much! Go 'long. Dad, you're talking silly!"

The old man weakened. He feebly trailed his axe between his legs to a stump and sat down, wiping his forehead with his sleeve, and imparting to it the appearance of a slate with a difficult sum partly rubbed out. He looked despairingly at Lance. "In course," he said, with a deep sigh, "you naterally ain't got any money. In course you left your pocket-book, containing fifty dollars, under a stone and can't find it. In course," he continued, as he observed Lance put his hand to his pocket, "you've only got a blank cheque on Wells, Farge & Co. for a hundred dollars, and you'ld like me to give you the difference?"

Amused as Lance evidently was at this, his absolute admiration for Flip absorbed everything else. With his eyes still fixed upon the girl, he briefly assured the old man that he would pay for everything he wanted. He did this with a manner quite different from the careless, easy attitude he had assumed towards Flip; at least the quickwitted girl noticed it, and wondered if he was angry. It was quite true that ever since his eye had fallen upon another of his own sex its glance had been less frank and careless. Certain traits of possible impatience which might develop into manslaying were coming to the fore. Yet a word or a gesture of Flip's was sufficient to change that manner, and when she had, with the fretful assistance of her father, prepared a somewhat sketchy and primitive repast, he questioned the old man about diamond-making. The eye of Dad kindled.

"I want ter know how ye knew I was making diamonds," he asked, with a certain bashful pettishness not unlike his daughter's.

"Heard it in 'Frisco," replied Lance, with glib mendacity glancing at the girl.

"I reckon they're gettin' sort of skeert down there—them jewellers," chuckled Dad; "yet it's in nater that their figgers will have to come down. It's only a question of the price of charcoal. I suppose they didn't tell you how I made the discovery?"

At any other time Lance would have stopped the old man's narrative by saying that he knew the story, but he wished to see how far Flip lent herself to her father's delusion.

"Ye see one night about two years ago I had a pit o' charcoal burning out there, and tho' it had been a smouldering and a smoking and a blazing for nigh unto a month, somehow it didn't charcoal worth a cent. And yet, dog my skin, but the heat o' that er pit was suthin' hidyus and frightful; ye couldn't stand within a hundred yards of it, and they could feel it on the stage road three miles over yon—t'other side the mountain. There was nights when me and Flip had to take our blankets up the ravine and camp out all night, and the back of this yer hut shrivelled up like that bacon. It was about as nigh on to hell as any sample ye kin get here. Now, mebbee you think I built that air fire? Mebbee you'll allow the heat was just the nat'ral burning of that pit?"

"Certainly," said Lance, trying to see Flip's eyes, which were resolutely averted.

"Thet's whar you'ld be lying! That yar heat kem out of the bowels of the yearth—kem up like out of a chimbley or a blast, and kep up that yar fire. And when she cools down a month after, and I got to strip her, there was a hole in the yearth and a spring o' bilin' scaldin' water pourin' out of it ez big as your waist. And right in the middle of it was this yer." He rose with the instinct of a skilful *raconteur*, and whisked from under his bunk a chamois-leather bag, which he emptied on the table before them. It contained a small fragment of native rock-crystal, half fused upon a petrified bit of pine. It was so glaringly truthful, so really what it purported to be, that the most

unscientific woodman or pioneer would have understood it at a glance. Lance raised his mirthful eyes to Flip. "It was cooled suddint—stunted by the water," said the girl eagerly. She stopped, and as abruptly turned away her eyes and her reddened face.

"That's it—that's just it," continued the old man. "Thar's Flip, thar—knows it—she ain't no fool!"

Lance did not speak, but turned a hard, unsympathising look upon the old man, and rose almost roughly. The old man clutched his coat. "That's it, ye see. The carbon's just turning to di'mens. And stunted. And why? 'Cos the heat wasn't kep up long enough. Mebbee yer think I stopped thar? That ain't me. Thar's a pit out yar in the woods ez hez been burning six months; it hain't, in course, got the advantages o' the old one, for it's nat'ral heat. But I'm keeping that heat up. I've got a hole where I kin watch it every four hours. When the time comes I'm thar! Don't you see? That's me! that's David Fairley—that's the old man—you bet!"

"That's so," said Lance curtly; "and now, Mr. Fairley, if you'll hand me over a coat or a jacket till I can get past these fogs on the Monterey Road, I won't keep you from your diamond pit." He threw down a handful of silver on the table.

"Ther's a deerskin jacket yer," said the old man, "that one o' them Vaqueros left for the price of a bottle of whisky."

"I reckon it wouldn't suit the stranger," said Flip, dubiously producing a much-worn, slashed, and braided Vaquero's jacket. But it did suit Lance, who found it warm, and also had suddenly found a certain satisfaction in opposing Flip. When he had put it on, and nodded coldly to the old man and carelessly to Flip, he walked to the door.

"If you're going to take the Monterey Road, I can show you a short cut to it," said Flip, with a certain kind of shy civility. The paternal Fairley groaned. "That's it; let

the chickens and the ranch go to thunder as long as there's a stranger to trapse round with ; go on !"

Lance would have made some savage reply, but Flip interrupted. "You know yourself, Dad, it's a blind trail, and as that 'ere constable that kem out here hunting French Pete couldn't find it, and had to go round by the cañon, like ez not the stranger would lose his way, and have to come back !" This dangerous prospect silenced the old man, and Flip and Lance stepped into the road together. They walked on for some moments without speaking. Suddenly Lance turned upon his companion.

"You didn't swallow all that rot about the diamond, did you ?" he asked crossly.

Flip ran a little ahead, as if to avoid a reply.

"You don't mean to say that's the sort of hog-wash the old man serves out to you regularly ?" continued Lance, becoming more slangy in his ill-temper.

"I don't know that it's any consarn o' yours what I think," replied Flip, hopping from boulder to boulder, as they crossed the bed of a dry watercourse.

"And I suppose you've piloted round and dry-nussed every tramp and dead-beat you've met since you came here ?" continued Lance, with unmistakable ill-humour. "How many have you helped over this road ?"

"It's a year since there was a Chinaman chased by some Irishman from the Crossing into the brush about yer, and he was too afeered to come out, and nigh most starved to death in thar. I had to drag him out and start him on the mountain, for you couldn't get him back to the road. He was the last one but *you*."

"Do you reckon it the right thing for a girl like you to run about with trash of this kind, and mix herself up with all sorts of roughs and bad company ?" said Lance.

Flip stopped short. "Look ! if you're goin' to talk like Dad I'll go back."

The ridiculousness of such a resemblance struck him

more keenly than a consciousness of his own ingratitude. He hastened to assure Flip that he was joking. When he had made his peace they fell into talk again, Lance becoming unselfish enough to inquire into one or two facts concerning her life which did not immediately affect him. Her mother had died on the plains when she was a baby, and her brother had run away from home at twelve. She fully expected to see him again, and thought he might sometime stray into their cañon. "That is why, then, you take so much stock in tramps," said Lance. "You expect to recognise *him?*"

"Well," replied Flip gravely, "there is suthing in *that*, and there's suthing in *this:* some o' these chaps might run across brother and do him a good turn for the sake of me."

"Like me, for instance?" suggested Lance.

"Like you. You'ld do him a good turn, wouldn't you?"

"You bet!" said Lance, with a sudden emotion that quite startled him; "only don't *you* go throwing yourselves round promiscuously." He was half-conscious of an irritating sense of jealousy, as he asked if any of her *protégés* had ever returned.

"No," said Flip, "no one ever did. It shows," she added with sublime simplicity, "I had done 'em good, and they could get on alone. Don't it?"

"It does," responded Lance grimly. "Have you any other friends that come?"

"Only the Postmaster at the Crossing."

"The Postmaster?"

"Yes; he's reckonin' to marry me next year if I'm big enough."

"And what do *you* reckon?" asked Lance earnestly. Flip began a series of distortions with her shoulders, ran on ahead, picked up a few pebbles and threw them into the wood, glanced back at Lance with swimming mottled eyes, that seemed a piquant incarnation of everything suggestive and tantalising, and said, "That's telling."

They had by this time reached the spot where they were to separate. "Look," said Flip, pointing to a faint deflection of their path, which seemed, however, to lose itself in the underbrush a dozen yards away, "there's your trail. It gets plainer and broader the farther you get on, but you must use your eyes here, and get to know it well afore you get into the fog. Good-bye."

"Good-bye." Lance took her hand and drew her beside him. She was still redolent of the spices of the thicket, and to the young man's excited fancy seemed at that moment to personify the perfume and intoxication of her native woods. Half laughingly, half earnestly, he tried to kiss her; she struggled for some time strongly, but at the last moment yielded with a slight return, and the exchange of a subtle fire that thrilled him and left him standing confused and astounded as she ran away. He watched her lithe, nymph-like figure disappear in the chequered shadows of the wood, and then he turned briskly down the half hidden trail. His eyesight was keen, he made good progress, and was soon well on his way towards the distant ridge.

But Flip's return had not been as rapid. When she reached the wood she crept to its beetling verge and looking across the cañon watched Lance's figure as it vanished and reappeared in the shadows and sinuosities of the ascent. When he reached the ridge the outlying fog crept across the summit, caught him in its embrace, and wrapped him from her gaze. Flip sighed, raised herself, put her alternate foot on a stump, and took a long pull at her too-brief stockings. When she had pulled down her skirt, and endeavoured once more to renew the intimacy that had existed in previous years between the edge of her petticoat and the top of her stockings, she sighed again, and went home.

CHAPTER III.

For six months the sea fogs monotonously came and went along the Monterey coast; for six months they beleagured the Coast Range with afternoon sorties of white hosts, that regularly swept over the mountain crest and were as regularly beaten back again by the levelled lances of the morning sun. For six months that white veil which had once hidden Lance Harriott in its folds returned without him. For that amiable outlaw no longer needed disguise or hiding-place. The swift wave of pursuit that had dashed him on the summit had fallen back, and the next day was broken and scattered. Before the week had passed a regular judicial inquiry relieved his crime of premeditation, and showed it to be a rude duel of two armed and equally desperate men. From a secure vantage in a sea-coast town, Lance challenged a trial by his peers, and, as an already prejudged man escaping from his executioners, obtained a change of venue. Regular justice, seated by the calm Pacific, found the action of an interior, irregular jury rash and hasty. Lance was liberated on bail.

The Postmaster at Fisher's Crossing had just received the weekly mail and express from San Francisco, and was engaged in examining them. They consisted of five letters and two parcels. Of these, three of the letters and the two parcels were directed to Flip. It was not the first time during the last six months that this extraordinary event had occurred, and the curiosity of the Crossing was duly excited. As Flip had never called personally for the letters or parcels, but had sent one of her wild, irregular scouts or henchmen to bring them, and as she was seldom seen at the Crossing or on the stage-road, that curiosity was never satisfied. The disappointment to the Postmaster—a man past the middle age—partook of a sentimental nature. He looked at the letters and parcels, he looked at his watch;

it was yet early, he could return by noon. He again examined the addresses; they were in the same handwriting of the previous letters. His mind was made up, he would deliver them himself. The poetic, soulful side of his mission was delicately indicated by a pale blue necktie, a clean shirt, and a small package of "ginger nuts," of which Flip was extravagantly fond.

The common road to Fairley's Rancho was by the stage turnpike to a point below the Gin and Ginger Woods, where the prudent horseman usually left his beast and followed the intersecting trail afoot. It was here that the Postmaster suddenly observed on the edge of the wood the figure of an elegantly-dressed woman; she was walking slowly and apparently at her ease, one hand held her skirts lightly gathered between her gloved fingers, the other slowly swung a riding-whip. Was it a picnic of some people from Monterey or Santa Cruz? The spectacle was novel enough to justify his coming nearer. Suddenly she withdrew in the wood; he lost sight of her; she was gone. He remembered, however, that he had still to call on Flip, and as the steep trail was beginning to tax all his energies, he was fain to hurry forward. The sun was nearly vertical when he turned into the cañon, and saw the bark roof of the cabin beyond. At almost the same moment Flip appeared, flushed and panting, in the road before him.

"You've got something for me," she said, pointing to the parcel and letter.

Completely taken by surprise, the Postmaster mechanically yielded them up and as instantly regretted it.

"They're paid for?" continued Flip, observing his hesitation.

"That's so," stammered the official of the Crossing, seeing his last chance of knowing the contents of the parcel vanish; "but I thought ez it's a valooable package, maybe ye might want to examine it to see that it was all right afore ye receipted for it."

"I'll risk it," said Flip coolly, "and if it ain't right I'll let ye know."

As the girl seemed inclined to retire with her property, the Postmaster was driven to other conversation. "We ain't had the pleasure of seeing you down at the Crossing for a month o' Sundays," he began, with airy yet pronounced gallantry. "Some folks let on you was keepin' company with some feller like Bijah Brown, and you were getting a little too set up for the Crossing." The individual here mentioned being the county butcher, and supposed to exhibit his hopeless affection for Flip by making a long and useless divergence from his weekly route to enter the cañon "for orders," Flip did not deem it necessary to reply. "Then I allowed ez how you might have company," he continued; "I reckon there's some City folks up at the Summit. I saw a mighty smart fash'n'ble gal cavorting round. Hed no end o' style and fancy fixin's. That's my kind, I tell you. I just weaken on that sort o' gal," he continued, in the firm belief that he had awakened Flip's jealousy, as he glanced at her well-worn homespun frock, and found her eyes suddenly fixed on his own.

"Strange I ain't got to see her yet," she replied coolly, shouldering her parcel, and quite ignoring any sense of obligation to him for his extra-official act.

"But you might get to see her at the edge of the Gin and Ginger Woods," he persisted feebly, in a last effort to detain her, "if you'll take a *pasear* there with me."

Flip's only response was to walk on towards the cabin, whence, with a vague complimentary suggestion of "droppin' in to pass the time o' day" with her father, the Postmaster meekly followed.

The paternal Fairley, once convinced that his daughter's new companion required no pecuniary or material assistance from his hands, relaxed to the extent of entering into a querulous confidence with him, during which Flip took the opportunity of slipping away. As Fairley had that infeli-

citous tendency of most weak natures to unconsciously exaggerate unimportant details in their talk, the Postmaster presently became convinced that the butcher was a constant and assiduous suitor of Flip's. The absurdity of his sending parcels and letters by post, when he might bring them himself, did not strike the official. On the contrary, he believed it to be a master-stroke of cunning. Fired by jealousy and Flip's indifference, he "deemed it his duty"—using that facile form of cowardly offensiveness—to betray Flip.

Of which she was happily oblivious. Once away from the cabin she plunged into the woods, with the parcel swung behind her like a knapsack. Leaving the trail, she presently struck off in a straight line through cover and underbrush with the unerring instinct of an animal, climbing hand-over-hand the steepest ascent, or fluttering like a bird from branch to branch down the deepest declivity. She soon reached that part of the trail where the susceptible Postmaster had seen the fascinating unknown. Assuring herself she was not followed, she crept through the thicket until she reached a little waterfall and basin that had served the fugitive Lance for a bath. The spot bore signs of later and more frequent occupancy, and when Flip carefully removed some bark and brushwood from a cavity in the rock and drew forth various folded garments, it was evident she had used it as a sylvan dressing-room! Here she opened the parcel; it contained a small and delicate shawl of yellow China crêpe. Flip instantly threw it over her shoulders and stepped hurriedly towards the edge of the wood. Then she began to pass backwards and forwards before the trunk of a tree. At first nothing was visible on the tree, but a closer inspection showed a large pane of ordinary window glass stuck in the fork of the branches. It was placed at such a cunning angle against the darkness of the forest opening that it made a soft and mysterious mirror, not unlike a Claude Lorraine glass,

wherein not only the passing figure of the young girl was seen, but the dazzling green and gold of the hillside, and the far-off silhouetted crests of the Coast Range.

But this was evidently only a prelude to a severer rehearsal. When she returned to the waterfall, she unearthed from her stores a large piece of yellow soap and some yards of rough cotton "sheeting." These she deposited beside the basin, and again crept to the edge of the wood to assure herself that she was alone. Satisfied that no intruding foot had invaded that virgin bower, she returned to her bath, and began to undress. A slight wind followed her, and seemed to whisper to the circumjacent trees. It appeared to waken her sister naïads and nymphs, who, joining their leafy fingers, softly drew around her a gently-moving band of trembling lights and shadows, of flecked sprays and inextricably mingled branches, and involved her in a chaste sylvan obscurity, veiled alike from pursuing god or stumbling shepherd. Within these hallowed precincts was the musical ripple of laughter and falling water, and at times the glimpse of a lithe briar-caught limb, or a ray of sunlight trembling over bright flanks or the white, austere outline of a childish bosom.

When she drew again the leafy curtain, and once more stepped out of the wood, she was completely transformed. It was the figure that had appeared to the Postmaster; the slight, erect, graceful form of a young woman modishly attired. It was Flip, but Flip made taller by the lengthened skirt and clinging habiliments of fashion. Flip freckled, but, through the cunning of a relief of yellow colour in her gown, her piquant brown-shot face and eyes brightened and intensified until she seemed like a spicy odour made visible. I cannot affirm that the judgment of Flip's mysterious *modiste* was infallible, or that the taste of Mr. Lance Harriott, her patron, was fastidious; enough that it was picturesque, and perhaps not more glaring and extravagant than the colour in which Spring herself had once clothed

the sere hillside where Flip was now seated. The phantom mirror in the tree fork caught and held her with the sky, the green leaves, the sunlight, and all the graciousness of her surroundings, and the wind gently tossed her hair and the gay ribbons of her gipsy hat. Suddenly she started. Some remote sound in the trail below, inaudible to any ear less fine than her own, arrested her breathing. She rose swiftly and darted into cover.

Ten minutes passed. The sun was declining; the white fog was beginning to creep over the Coast Range. And then from the edge of the wood Cinderella appeared, disenchanted, and in her homespun garments. The clock had struck, the spell was past. As she disappeared down the trail even the magic mirror, moved by the wind, slipped from the tree top to the ground and became a piece of common glass.

CHAPTER IV.

The events of the day had produced a remarkable impression on the facial aspect of the charcoal-burning Fairley. Extraordinary processes of thought, indicated by repeated rubbing of his forehead, had produced a high light in the middle and a corresponding deepening of shadow at the sides, until it bore the appearance of a perfect sphere. It was this forehead that confronted Flip reproachfully as became a deceived comrade, menacingly as became an outraged parent in the presence of a third party and—a Postmaster!

"Fine doin's this, yer receivin' clandecent bundles and letters, eh?" he began.

Flip sent one swift, withering look of contempt at the Postmaster, who at once becoming invertebrate and grovelling, mumbled that he must "get on" to the Crossing, and rose to go. But the old man, who had counted on his

presence for moral support, and was clearly beginning to hate him for precipitating this scene with his daughter, whom he feared, violently protested.

"Sit down, can't ye? Don't you see you're a witness?" he screamed hysterically.

It was a fatal suggestion. "Witness!" repeated Flip scornfully.

"Yes, a witness! He gave ye letters and bundles."

"Weren't they directed to me?" asked Flip.

"Yes," said the Postmaster hesitatingly; "in course, yes."

"Do *you* lay claim to them?" she said, turning to her father.

"No," responded the old man.

"Do you?" sharply, to the Postmaster.

"No," he replied.

"Then," said Flip coolly, "if you're not claimin' 'em for yourself, and you hear father say they ain't his, I reckon the less you have to say about 'em the better."

"Thar's suthin' in that," said the old man, shamelessly abandoning the Postmaster.

"Then why don't she say who sent 'em, and what they are like," said the Postmaster, "if there's nothin' in it?"

"Yes," echoed Dad feebly. "Flip, why don't you?"

Without answering the direct question, Flip turned upon her father.

"Maybe you forget how you used to row and tear round here because tramps and such like came to the ranch for suthin', and I gave it to 'em? Maybe you'll quit tearin' round and letting yourself be made a fool of now by that man, just because one of those tramps gets up and sends us some presents back in return?"

"'Twasn't me, Flip," said the old man deprecatingly, but glaring at the astonished Postmaster. "Twasn't my doin'. I allus said if you cast your bread on the waters it would come back to you by return mail. The fact is the

Gov'ment is gettin' too high-handed! Some o' these bloated officials had better climb down before next leckshen."

"Maybe," continued Flip to her father, without looking at their discomfited visitor, "ye'd better find out whether one of those officials comes up to this yer ranch to steal away a gal about my own size, or to get points about diamond-making; I reckon he don't travel round to find out who writes all the letters that goes through the post-office."

The Postmaster had seemingly miscalculated the old man's infirm temper, and the daughter's skilful use of it. He was unprepared for Flip's boldness and audacity, and when he saw that both barrels of the accusation had taken effect on the charcoal-burner, who was rising with epileptic rage, he fairly turned and fled. The old man would have followed him with objurgation beyond the door but for the restraining hand of Flip.

Baffled and beaten, nevertheless Fate was not wholly unkind to the retreating suitor. Near the Gin and Ginger Woods he picked up a letter which had fallen from the pocket of Flip. He recognised the writing, and did not scruple to read it. It was not a love epistle—at least, not such a one as *he* would have written; it did not give the address nor the name of the correspondent; but he read the following with greedy eyes—

"Perhaps it's just as well that you don't rig yourself out for the benefit of those dead-beats at the Crossing, or any tramp that might hang round the ranch. Keep all your style for me when I come. I can't tell you when—it's mighty uncertain before the rainy season. But I'm coming soon. Don't go back on your promise about lettin' up on the tramps and being a little more high-toned. And don't you give 'em so much. It's true I sent you hats *twice*. I clean forgot all about the first; but *I* wouldn't have given a ten-dollar hat to a nigger woman who had a sick baby because

I had an extra hat. I'd have let that baby slide. I forgot to ask whether the skirt is worn separately; I must see that dressmaking sharp about it; but I think you'll want something on besides a jacket and skirt, at least it looks like it up here. I don't think you could manage a piano down there without the old man knowing it, and raisin' the devil generally. I promised you I'd let up on him. Mind you keep all your promises to me. I'm glad you're gettin' on with the six-shooter; tin cans are good at fifteen yards, but try it on sunthin' that *moves!* I forgot to say that I am on the track of your big brother. It's a three years' old track, and he was in Arizona. The friend who told me didn't expatiate much on what he did there, but I reckon they had a high old time. If he's above the earth I'll find him, you bet. The *yerba buena* and the southern-wood came all right—they smelt like you. Say, Flip, do you remember the *last*—the *very last* thing that happened when you said 'Good-bye' on the trail. Don't let me ever find out that you've let anybody else kiss"—— But here the virtuous indignation of the Postmaster found vent in an oath. He threw the letter away. He retained of it only two facts—Flip *had* a brother who was missing; she had a lover present in the flesh.

How much of the substance of this and previous letters Flip had confided to her father I cannot say. If she suppressed anything it was probably that which affected Lance's secret alone, and it was doubtful how much of that she herself knew. In her own affairs she was frank without being communicative, and never lost her shy obstinacy even with her father. Governing the old man as completely as she did, she appeared most embarrassed when she was most dominant; she had her own way without lifting her voice or her eyes, she seemed oppressed by *mauvaise honte* when she was most triumphant; she would end a discussion with a shy murmur addressed to herself, or a single gesture of self-consciousness.

The disclosure of her strange relations with an unknown man, and the exchange of presents and confidences, seemed to suddenly awake Fairley to a vague uneasy sense of some unfulfilled duties as a parent. The first effect of this on his weak nature was a peevish antagonism to the cause of it. He had long fretful monologues on the vanity of diamond-making, if accompanied with "pestering" by "interlopers," on the wickedness of concealment and conspiracy, and their effects on charcoal-burning, on the nurturing of spies and "adders" in the family circle, and on the seditiousness of dark and mysterious councils in which a grey-haired father was left out. It was true that a word or a look from Flip generally brought these monologues to an inglorious and abrupt termination, but they were none the less lugubrious as long as they lasted. In time they were succeeded by an affectation of contrite apology and self-depreciation. "Don't go out o' the way to ask the old man," he would say, referring to the quantity of bacon to be ordered; "it's nat'ral a young gal should have her own advisers." The state of the flour-barrel would also produce a like self-abasement. "Unless ye're already in correspondence about more flour ye might take the opinion o' the first tramp ye meet ez whether Santa Cruz Mills is a good brand, but don't ask the old man." If Flip was in conversation with the butcher, Fairley would obtrusively and markedly retire with the hope "he wasn't intrudin' on their secrets."

These phases of her father's weakness were not frequent enough to excite her alarm, but she could not help noticing they were accompanied with a seriousness unusual to him. He began to be tremulously watchful of her, returning often from work at an earlier hour, and lingering by the cabin in the morning. He brought absurd and useless presents for her, and presented them with a nervous anxiety, poorly concealed by an assumption of careless, paternal generosity. "Suthin' I picked up at the Crossing for ye

to-day," he would say airily, and retire to watch the effect of a pair of shoes two sizes too large, or a fur cap in September. He would have hired a cheap parlour-organ for her, but for the apparently unexpected revelation that she couldn't play. He had received the news of a clue to his long-lost son without emotion, but lately he seemed to look upon it as a foregone conclusion, and one that necessarily solved the question of companionship for Flip. "In course, when you've got your own flesh and blood with ye, ye can't go foolin' around with strangers." These autumnal blossoms of affection, I fear, came too late for any effect upon Flip, precociously matured by her father's indifference and selfishness. But she was good-humoured, and seeing him seriously concerned, gave him more of her time, even visited him in the sacred seclusion of the "diamond pit" and listened with far-off eyes to his fitful indictment of all things outside his grimy laboratory. Much of this patient indifference came with a capricious change in her own habits; she no longer indulged in the rehearsal of dress, she packed away her most treasured garments, and her leafy boudoir knew her no more. She sometimes walked on the hillside, and often followed the trail which she had taken with Lance, when she led him to the rancho. She once or twice extended her walk to the spot where she had parted from him, and as often came shyly away, her eyes downcast and her face warm with colour. Perhaps because these experiences and some mysterious instinct of maturing womanhood had left a story in her eyes, which her two adorers, the Postmaster and the butcher, read with passion, she became famous without knowing it. Extravagant stories of her fascinations brought strangers into the valley. The effect upon her father may be imagined. Lance could not have desired a more effective guardian than he proved to be in this emergency. Those who had been told of this hidden pearl were surprised to find it so jealously protected.

CHAPTER V.

THE long parched summer had drawn to its dusty close. Much of it was already blown abroad and dissipated on trail and turnpike, or crackled in harsh, unelastic fibres on hillside and meadow. Some of it had disappeared in the palpable smoke by day and fiery crests by night of burning forests. The besieging fogs on the Coast Range daily thinned their hosts, and at last vanished. The wind changed from north-west to south-west. The salt breath of the sea was on the summit. And then one day, the staring, unchanged sky was faintly touched with remote mysterious clouds, and grew tremulous in expression. The next morning dawned upon a newer face in the heavens, on changed woods, on altered outlines, on vanished crests, on forgotten distances. It was raining!

Four weeks of this change, with broken spaces of sunlight, and intense blue aërial islands, and then a storm set in. All day the summit pines and redwoods rocked in the blast. At times the onset of the rain seemed to be held back by the fury of the gale, or was visibly seen in sharp waves on the hillside. Unknown and concealed watercourses suddenly overflowed the trails, pools became lakes, and brooks rivers. Hidden from the storm, the sylvan silence of sheltered valleys was broken by the impetuous rush of waters; even the tiny streamlet that traversed Flip's retreat in the Gin and Ginger Woods became a cascade.

The storm drove Fairley from his couch early. The falling of a large tree across the trail, and the sudden overflow of a small stream beside it, hastened his steps. But he was doomed to encounter what was to him a more disagreeable object—a human figure. By the bedraggled drapery that flapped and fluttered in the wind, by the long, unkempt hair that hid the face and eyes, and by the

grotesquely-misplaced bonnet, the old man recognised one of his old trespassers—an Indian squaw.

"Clear out 'er that! Come, make tracks, will ye?" the old man screamed; but here the wind stopped his voice, and drove him against a hazel bush.

"Me heap sick," answered the squaw, shivering through her muddy shawl.

"I'll make ye a heap sicker if ye don't vamose the ranch," continued Fairley, advancing.

"Me wantee Wangee girl. Wangee girl give me heap grub," said the squaw, without moving.

"You bet your life," groaned the old man to himself. Nevertheless an idea struck him. "Ye ain't brought no presents, hev ye!" he asked cautiously. "Ye ain't got no pootey things for poor Wangee girl?" he continued insinuatingly.

"Me got heap *cache* nuts and berries," said the squaw.

"Oh, in course! in course! That's just it," screamed Fairley; "you've got 'em *cached* only two mile from yer, and you'll go and get 'em for a half-dollar, cash down."

"Me bring Wangee girl to *cache*," replied the Indian, pointing to the wood; "honest Injin."

Another bright idea struck Mr. Fairley. But it required some cautious elaboration. Hurrying the squaw with him through the pelting rain, he reached the shelter of the corral. Vainly the shivering aborigine drew her tightly-bandaged papoose closer to her square flat breast and looked longingly towards the cabin; the old man backed her against the palisade. Here he cautiously imparted his dark intentions to employ her to keep watch and ward over the rancho, and especially over its young mistress—"Clear out all the tramps 'ceptin' yourself, and I'll keep ye in grub and rum." Many and deliberate repetitions of this offer in various forms at last seem to affect the squaw; she nodded violently, and echoed the last word "rum." "Now," she added. The old man hesitated; she was in possession of

his secret; he groaned, and promising an immediate instalment of liquor, led her to the cabin.

The door was so securely fastened against the impact of the storm, that some moments elapsed before the bar was drawn, and the old man had become impatient and profane. When it was partly opened by Flip, he hastily slipped in, dragging the squaw after him, and cast one single, suspicious glance around the rude apartment which served as a sitting-room. Flip had apparently been writing. A small inkstand was still on the board table, but her paper had evidently been concealed before she allowed them to enter. The squaw instantly squatted before the adobe hearth, warmed her bundled baby, and left the ceremony of introduction to her companion. Flip regarded the two with calm preoccupation and indifference. The only thing that touched her interest was the old squaw's draggled skirt and limp neckerchief. They were Flip's own, long since abandoned and cast off in the Gin and Ginger Woods. "Secrets again," whined the paternal Fairley, still eying Flip furtively. "Secrets again, in course—in course—jiss so. Secrets that must be kep from the ole man! Dark doin's by one's own flesh and blood. Go on! go on! Don't mind me." Flip did not reply; she had even lost the interest in her old dress; perhaps it had only touched some note in unison with her reverie.

"Can't ye get the poor critter some whisky!" he queried fretfully. "Ye used to be peart enuff before." As Flip turned to the corner to lift the demijohn, Fairley took occasion to kick the squaw with his foot, and indicate by extravagant pantomime that the bargain was not to be alluded to before the girl. Flip poured out some whisky in a tin cup, and, approaching the squaw, handed it to her. "It's like ez not," continued Fairley to his daughter, but looking at the squaw, "that she'll be hauntin' the woods off and on, and kinder looking after the last pit near the *Madroños;* ye'll give her grub and licker ez she likes.

Well, d'ye hear, Flip? Are ye moonin' agin with yer secrets? What's gone with ye?"

If the child were dreaming, it was a delicious dream. Her magnetic eyes were suffused by a strange light, as though the eye itself had blushed; her full pulse showed itself more in the rounding outline of her cheek than in any deepening of colour; indeed, if there was any heightening of tint, it was in her freckles, which fairly glistened like tiny spangles. Her eyes were downcast, her shoulders slightly bent, but her voice was low and clear and thoughtful as ever.

"One o' the big pines above the *Madroño* pit has blown over into the run," she said quietly. "It's choked up the water, and it's risin' fast. Like ez not it's pourin' over into the pit by this time."

The old man rose with a fretful cry. "And why in blazes didn't you say so first?" he screamed, catching up his axe, and rushing to the door.

"Ye didn't give me a chance," said Flip, raising her eyes for the first time. With an impatient imprecation Fairley darted by her and rushed into the wood. In an instant she had shut the door and bolted it; in the same instant the squaw arose, dashed the long hair not only from her eyes but from her head, tore away her shawl and blanket, and revealed the square shoulders of Lance Harriott! Flip remained leaning against the door; but the young man in rising dropped the bandaged papoose, which rolled from his lap into the fire. Flip, with a cry, sprang towards it; but Lance caught her by the waist with one arm, as with the other he dragged the bundle from the flames. "Don't be alarmed," he said gaily; "it's only"——

"What?" said Flip, trying to disengage herself.

"My coat and trousers."

Flip laughed, which encouraged Lance to another attempt to kiss her. She evaded it by diving her head into his waistcoat and saying, "There's father."

"But he's gone to clear away that tree?" suggested Lance.

One of Flip's significant silences followed.

"Oh, I see," he laughed. "That was a plant to get him away! Ah!" She had released herself.

"Why did you come like that?" she said, pointing to his wig and blanket.

"To see if you'd know me," he responded.

"No," said Flip, dropping her eyes, "it was to keep other people from knowing you. You're hidin' agin."

"I am," returned Lance; "but," he interrupted gaily, "it's only the same old thing."

"But you wrote from Monterey that it was all over," she persisted.

"So it would have been," he said gloomily, "but for some dog down here who is hunting up an old scent. I'll spot him yet, and"—— he stopped suddenly, with such utter abstraction of hatred in his fixed and glittering eyes that she almost feared him. She laid her hand quite unconsciously on his arm. He grasped it—his face changed.

"I couldn't wait any longer to see you, Flip, so I came here anyway," he went on gaily. "I thought to hang round and get a chance to speak to you first, when I fell afoul of the old man. He didn't know me, and tumbled right in my little game. Why; do you believe he wants to hire me for my grub and liquor, to act as a sort of sentry over you and the rancho?" And here he related with great gusto the substance of his interview. "I reckon as he's that suspicious," he concluded, "I'd better play it out now as I've begun, only it's mighty hard I can't see you here before the fire in your fancy toggery, Flip, but must dodge in and out of the wet underbrush in these yer duds of yours that I picked up in the old place in the Gin and Ginger Woods."

"Then you came here just to see me?" added Flip.

"I did."

"For only that?"

"Only that."

Flip dropped her eyes. Lance had got his other arm around her waist, but her resisting little hand was still potent.

"Listen," she said at last, without looking up, but apparently talking to the intruding arm, "when Dad comes I'll get him to send you to watch the diamond pit. It isn't far; it's warm, and"——

"What?"

"I'll come after a bit and see you. Quit foolin' now. If you'd only have come here like yourself—like—like—a white man."

"The old man," interrupted Lance, "would have just passed me on to the summit. I couldn't have played the lost fisherman on him at this time of year."

"Ye could have been stopped at the Crossing by high water, you silly," said the girl. "It was." This grammatical obscurity referred to the stage-coach.

"Yes, but I might have been tracked to this cabin. And look here, Flip," he said, suddenly straightening himself, and lifting the girl's face to a level with his own, "I don't want you to lie any more for me. It ain't right."

"All right. Ye needn't go to the pit, then, and I won't come."

"Flip!"

"And here's Dad coming. Quick!"

Lance chose to put his own interpretation on this last adjuration. The resisting little hand was now lying quite limp on his shoulder. He drew her brown, bright face near his own, felt her spiced breath on his lips, his cheeks, his hot eyelids, his swimming eyes, kissed her, hurriedly replaced his wig and blanket, and dropped beside the fire with the tremulous laugh of youth and innocent first passion. Flip had withdrawn to the window, and was looking out upon the rocking pines.

"He don't seem to be coming," said Lance, with a half shy laugh.

"No," responded Flip demurely, pressing her hot oval cheek against the wet panes; "I reckon I was mistaken. You're sure," she added, looking resolutely another way, but still trembling like a magnetic needle towards Lance, as he moved slightly before the fire, "you're *sure* you'd like me to come to you?"

"Sure, Flip?"

"Hush!" said Flip, as this re-assuring query of reproachful astonishment appeared about to be emphasised by a forward amatory dash of Lance's; "hush! he's coming this time, sure."

It was indeed Fairley, exceedingly wet, exceedingly bedraggled, exceedingly sponged out as to colour, and exceedingly profane. It appeared that there was, indeed, a tree that had fallen in the "run," but that, far from diverting the overflow into the pit, it had established "back water," which had forced another outlet. All this might have been detected at once by any human intellect not distracted by correspondence with strangers, and enfeebled by habitually scorning the intellect of its own progenitor. This reckless selfishness had further only resulted in giving "rheumatics" to that progenitor, who now required the external administration of opodeldoc to his limbs, and the internal administration of whisky. Having thus spoken, Mr. Fairley, with great promptitude and infantine simplicity, at once bared two legs of entirely different colours, and mutely waited for his daughter to rub them. If Flip did this all unconsciously, and with the mechanical dexterity of previous habit, it was because she did not quite understand the savage eyes and impatient gestures of Lance in his encompassing wig and blanket, and because it helped her to voice her thought.

"Ye'll never be able to take your reg'lar watch at the diamond pit to-night, Dad," she said; "and I've been

reck'nin' you might set the squaw there instead. I can show her what to do."

But to Flip's momentary discomfiture, her father promptly objected. "Mebbee I've got suthin' else for her to do. Mebbee I may have *my* secrets too—eh?" he said, with dark significance, at the same time administering a significant nudge to Lance, which kept up the young man's exasperation. "No, she'll rest yer a bit just now. I'll set her to watchin' suthin' else, like as not, when I want her." Flip fell into one of her suggestive silences. Lance watched her earnestly, mollified by a single furtive glance from her significant eyes; the rain dashed against the windows, and occasionally spattered and hissed in the hearth of the broad chimney, and Mr. David Fairley, somewhat assuaged by the internal administration of whisky, grew more loquacious. The genius of incongruity and inconsistency which generally ruled his conduct came out with freshened vigour under the gentle stimulation of spirit. "On an evening like this," he began, comfortably settling himself on the floor beside the chimney, "ye might rig yerself out in them new duds and fancy fixin's that that Sacramento shrimp sent ye, and let your own flesh and blood see ye. If that's too much to do for your ole Dad, ye might do it to please that digger squaw as a Christian act." Whether in the hidden depths of the old man's consciousness there was a feeling of paternal vanity in showing this wretched aborigine the value and importance of the treasure she was about to guard I cannot say. Flip darted an interrogatory look at Lance, who nodded a quiet assent, and she flew into the inner room. She did not linger on the details of her toilet, but reappeared almost the next moment in her new finery, buttoning the neck of her gown as she entered the room, and chastely stopping at the window to characteristically pull up her stocking. The peculiarity of her situation increased her usual shyness; she played with the black and gold beads of a handsome neck-

lace—Lance's last gift—as the merest child might; her unbuckled shoe gave the squaw a natural opportunity of showing her admiration and devotion by insisting upon buckling it, and gave Lance under that disguise an opportunity of covertly kissing the little foot and ankle in the shadow of the chimney; an event which provoked slight hysterical symptoms in Flip, and caused her to sit suddenly down in spite of the remonstrance of her parent. "Ef you can't quit gigglin' and squirmin' like an Injin baby yourself, ye'd better git rid o' them duds," he ejaculated with peevish scorn.

Yet even under this perfunctory rebuke his weak vanity could not be hidden, and he enjoyed the evident admiration of a creature whom he believed to be half-witted and degraded, all the more keenly because it did not make him jealous. She could not take Flip from him. Rendered garrulous by liquor, he went to voice his contempt for those who might attempt it. Taking advantage of his daughter's absence to resume her homely garments, he whispered confidentially to Lance—

"Ye see these yer fine dresses, ye might think is presents. P'r'aps Flip lets on they are? P'r'aps she don't know any better. But they ain't presents. They're only samples o' dressmaking and jewellery that a vain, conceited shrimp of a feller up in Sacramento sends down here to get customers for. In course I'm to pay for 'em. In course he reckons I'm to do it. In course I calkilate to do it: but he needn't try to play 'em off as presents. He talks suthin' o' coming down here, sportin' hisself off on Flip as a fancy buck! Not ez long ez the old man's here—you bet." Thoroughly carried away by his fancied wrongs, it was perhaps fortunate that he did not observe the flashing eyes of Lance behind his lank and lustreless wig; but seeing only the figure of Lance as he had conjured him, he went on. "That's why I want you to hang around her. Hang around her ontil my boy—him that's comin' home

on a visit—gets here, and I reckon he'll clear out that yar Sacramento counterjumper. Only let me get a sight o' him afore Flip does. Eh? D'ye hear? Dog my skin if I don't believe the d——d Injin's drunk." It was fortunate that at that moment Flip reappeared, and dropping on the hearth between her father and the infuriated Lance, let her hand slip in his with a warning pressure. The light touch momentarily recalled him to himself and her, but not until the quickwitted girl had had revealed to her in one startled wave of consciousness the full extent of Lance's infirmity of temper. With the instinct of awakened tenderness came a sense of responsibility and a vague premonition of danger. The coy blossom of her heart was scarce unfolded before it was chilled by approaching shadows. Fearful of she knew not what, she hesitated. Every moment of Lance's stay was imperilled by a single word that might spring from his suppressed white lips; beyond and above the suspicions his sudden withdrawal might awaken in her father's breast, she was dimly conscious of some mysterious terror without that awaited him. She listened to the furious onslaught of the wind upon the sycamores beside their cabin, and thought she heard it there; she listened to the sharp fusilade of rain upon roof and pane, and the turbulent roar and rush of leaping mountain torrents at their very feet, and fancied it was there. She suddenly sprang to the window, and pressing her eyes to the pane saw through the misty turmoil of tossing boughs and swaying branches the scintillating intermittent flames of torches moving on the trail above, and *knew* it was there!

In an instant she was collected and calm. "Dad," she said, in her ordinary indifferent tone, "there's torches movin' up toward the diamond pit. Likely it's tramps. I'll take the squaw and see." And before the old man could stagger to his feet she had dragged Lance with her into the road.

CHAPTER VI.

The wind charged down upon them, slamming the door at their backs, extinguishing the broad shaft of light that had momentarily shot out into the darkness, and swept them a dozen yards away. Gaining the lee of a madroño tree, Lance opened his blanketed arms, enfolded the girl, and felt her for one brief moment tremble and nestle in his bosom like some frightened animal.

"Well," he said, gaily, "what next?"

Flip recovered herself. "You're safe now anywhere outside the house. But did you expect them to-night?"

Lance shrugged his shoulders. "Why not?"

"Hush!" returned the girl; "they're coming this way."

The four flickering, scattered lights presently dropped into line. The trail had been found; they were coming nearer. Flip breathed quickly; the spiced aroma of her presence filled the blanket as he drew her tightly beside him. He had forgotten the storm that raged around them, the mysterious foe that was approaching, until Flip caught his sleeve with a slight laugh.

"Why, it's Kennedy and Bijah."

"Who's Kennedy and Bijah?" asked Lance curtly.

"Kennedy's the Postmaster, and Bijah's the butcher."

"What do they want?" continued Lance.

"Me," said Flip coyly.

"You?"

"Yes; let's run away."

Half leading, half dragging her friend, Flip made her way with unerring woodcraft down the ravine. The sound of voices and even the tumult of the storm became fainter, an acrid smell of burning greenwood smarted Lance's lips and eyes; in the midst of the profound darkness beneath him gradually a faint, gigantic nimbus like a lurid eye

glowed and sank, quivered and faded with the spent breath of the gale as it penetrated their retreat. "The pit," whispered Flip; "it's safe on the other side," she added, cautiously skirting the orbit of the great eye, and leading him to a sheltered nest of bark and sawdust. It was warm and odorous. Nevertheless, they both deemed it necessary to enwrap themselves in the single blanket. The eye beamed fitfully upon them, occasionally a wave of lambent tremulousness passed across it; its weirdness was an excuse for their drawing nearer each other in playful terror.

"Flip."

"Well?"

"What did the other two want? To see you *too?*"

"Likely," said Flip, without the least trace of coquetry. "There's been a lot of strangers yer, off and on."

"Perhaps you'd like to go back and see them?"

"Do you want me to?"

Lance's reply was a kiss. Nevertheless he was vaguely uneasy. "Looks a little as if I were running away, don't it?" he suggested.

"No," said Flip, "they think you're only a squaw; it's me they're after."

Lance smarted a little at this infelicitous speech. A strange and irritating sensation had been creeping over him —it was his first experience of shame and remorse. "I reckon I'll go back and see," he said, rising abruptly.

Flip was silent. She was thinking. Believing that the men were seeking her only, she knew that their attention would be directed from her companion when it was found out he was no longer with her, and she dreaded to meet them in his irritable presence.

"Go," she said, "tell Dad something's gone wrong in the diamond pit, and say I'm watching it for him here."

"And you?"

"I'll go there and wait for him. If he can't get rid of them, and they follow him there, I'll come back here and

meet you. Anyhow, I'll manage to have Dad wait there a spell."

She took his hand and led him back by a different path to the trail. He was surprised to find that the cabin, its window glowing from the fire, was only a hundred yards away. "Go in the back way, by the shed. Don't go in the room, nor near the light if you can. Don't talk inside, but call or beckon to Dad. Remember," she said with a laugh, "you're keeping watch of me for him. Pull your hair down on your eyes, so." This operation, like most feminine embellishments of the masculine toilette, was attended by a kiss, and Flip, stepping back into the shadow, vanished in the storm.

Lance's first movements were inconsistent with his assumed sex. He picked up his draggled skirt, and drew a bowie-knife from his boot. From his bosom he took a revolver, turning the chambers noiselessly as he felt the caps. He then crept towards the cabin softly and gained the shed. It was quite dark but for a pencil of light piercing a crack of the rude ill-fitting door that opened on the sitting-room. A single voice not unfamiliar to him, raised in half brutal triumph, greeted his ears. A name was mentioned—his own? His angry hand was on the latch. One moment more and he would have burst the door, but in that instant another name was uttered—a name that dropped his hand from the latch and the blood from his cheeks. He staggered backward, passed his hand swiftly across his forehead, recovered himself with a gesture of mingled rage and despair, and sinking on his knees beside the door pressed his hot temples against the crack.

"Do I know Lance Harriott?" said the voice. "Do I know the d——d ruffian? Didn't I hunt him a year ago into the brush three miles from the Crossing? Didn't we lose sight of him the very day he turned up yer at this ranche, and got smuggled over into Monterey? Ain't it the same man as killed Arkansaw Bob—Bob Ridley

—the name he went by in Sonora? And who was Bob Ridley, eh? Who? Why, you d——d old fool, it was Bob Fairley—YOUR SON!"

The old man's voice rose querulous and indistinct.

"What are ye talkin' about?" interrupted the first speaker. "I tell you I *know*. Look at these pictures, I found 'em on his body. Look at 'em. Pictures of you and your girl. P'r'aps you'll deny them. P'r'aps you'll tell me I lie when I tell you *he* told me he was your son; told me how he ran away from you, how you were livin' somewhere in the mountains makin' gold or suthin' else outer charcoal. He told me who he was as a secret. He never let on he told it to any one else. And when I found that the man who killed him, Lance Harriott, had been hidin' here, had been sendin' spies all around to find out all about your son, had been foolin' you and tryin' to ruin your gal as he had killed your boy, I know that *he* knew it too."

"LIAR!"

The door fell in with a crash. There was the sudden apparition of a demoniac face, still half-hidden by the long trailing black locks of hair that curled like Medusa's around it. A cry of terror filled the room. Three of the men dashed from the door and fled precipitately. The man who had spoken sprang towards his rifle in the chimney corner. But the movement was his last; a blinding flash and shattering report interposed between him and his weapon. The impulse carried him forward headlong into the fire, that hissed and spluttered with his blood, and Lance Harriott, with his smoking pistol, strode past him to the door. Already far down the trail there were hurried voices, the crash and crackling of impeding branches growing fainter and fainter in the distance. Lance turned back to the solitary living figure —the old man.

Yet he might have been dead too, he sat so rigid

and motionless, his fixed eyes staring vacantly at the body on the hearth. Before him on the table lay two cheap photographs, one evidently of himself, taken in some remote epoch of complexion, one of a child which Lance recognised as Flip.

"Tell me," said Lance hoarsely, laying his quivering hand on the table, "was Bob Ridley your son?"

"My son!" echoed the old man, in a strange, far-off voice, without turning his eyes from the corpse—"My son —is—is—is there!" pointing to the dead man. "Hush! Didn't he tell you so? Didn't you hear him say it? Dead —dead—shot—shot!"

"Silence! are you crazy, man?" repeated Lance tremblingly; "that is not Bob Ridley, but a dog, a coward, a liar gone to his reckoning. Hear me! If your son *was* Bob Ridley, I swear to God I never knew it, now or—or—*then.* Do you hear me? Tell me! Do you believe me? Speak! You shall speak."

He laid his hand almost menacingly on the old man's shoulder. Fairley slowly raised his head. Lance fell back with a groan of horror. The weak lips were wreathed with a feeble imploring smile, but the eyes wherein the fretful, peevish, suspicious spirit had dwelt were blank and tenantless; the flickering intellect that had lit them was blown out and vanished.

Lance walked towards the door and remained motionless for a moment, gazing into the night. When he turned back again towards the fire his face was as colourless as the dead man's on the hearth; the fire of passion was gone from his beaten eyes; his step was hesitating and slow. He went up to the table.

"I say, old man," he said, with a strange smile and an odd, premature suggestion of the infinite weariness of death in his voice, "you wouldn't mind giving me this, would you?" and he took up the picture of Flip.

The old man nodded repeatedly.

"Thank you," said Lance. He went to the door, paused a moment, and returned. "Good-bye, old man," he said, holding out his hand.

Fairley took it, with a childish smile. "He's dead," said the old man softly, holding Lance's hand, but pointing to the hearth.

"Yes," said Lance, with the faintest of smiles on the palest of faces. "You feel sorry for any one that's dead, don't you?" Fairley nodded again. Lance looked at him with eyes as remote as his own, shook his hand, and turned away. When he reached the door he laid his revolver carefully, and, indeed, somewhat ostentatiously, upon a chair. But when he stepped from the threshold he stopped a moment in the light of the open door to examine the lock of a small derringer which he drew from his pocket. He then shut the door carefully, and with the same slow, hesitating step, felt his way into the night.

He had but one idea in his mind—to find some lonely spot; some spot where the footsteps of man would never penetrate, some spot that would yield him rest, sleep, obliteration, forgetfulness—and, above all, where *he* would be forgotten. He had seen such places—surely there were many—where bones were picked up of dead men who had faded from the earth and had left no other record. If he could only keep his senses now he might find such a spot, but he must be careful, for her little feet went everywhere, and she must never see him again alive or dead. And in the midst of his thoughts, and the darkness, and the storm, he heard a voice at his side—"Lance, how long you have been!"

. . . . . .

Left to himself, the old man again fell into a vacant contemplation of the dead body before him, until a stronger blast swept down like an avalanche upon the cabin, burst through the ill-fastened door and broken chimney, and dashing the ashes and living embers over the floor, filled the room with smoke and flame. Fairley rose

with a feeble cry, and then, as if acted upon by some dominant memory, groped under the bed until he found his buckskin bag and his precious crystal, and fled precipitantly from the room. Lifted by this second shock from his apathy, he returned to the fixed idea of his life —the discovery and creation of the diamond—and forgot all else. The feeble grasp that his shaken intellect kept of the events of the night relaxed, the disguised Lance, the story of his son, the murder, slipped into nothingness; there remained only the one idea—his nightly watch by the diamond pit. The instinct of long habit was stronger than the darkness or the onset of the storm, and he kept his tottering way over stream and fallen timber until he reached the spot. A sudden tremor seemed to shake the lambent flame that had lured him on. He thought he heard the sound of voices; there were signs of recent disturbance—footprints in the sawdust! With a cry of rage and suspicion, Fairley slipped into the pit and sprang towards the nearest opening. To his frenzied fancy it had been tampered with, his secret discovered, the fruit of his long labours stolen from him that very night. With superhuman strength he began to open the pit, scattering the half-charred logs right and left, and giving free vent to the suffocating gases that rose from the now incandescent charcoal. At times the fury of the gale would drive it back and hold it against the sides of the pit, leaving the opening free; at times, following the blind instinct of habit, the demented man would fall upon his face and bury his nose and mouth in the wet bark and sawdust. At last, the paroxysm past, he sank back again in his old apathetic attitude of watching, the attitude he had so often kept beside his sylvan crucible. In this attitude and in silence he waited for the dawn.

It came with a hush in the storm; it came with blue openings in the broken-up and tumbled heavens; it came with stars that glistened first and then paled, and at last sank drowning in those deep cerulean lakes; it came with

those cerulean lakes broadening into vaster seas, whose shores expanded at last into one illimitable ocean, cerulean no more, but flecked with crimson and opal dyes; it came with the lightly-lifted misty curtain of the day, torn and rent on crag and pine top, but always lifting, lifting. It came with the sparkle of emerald in the young grasses, and the flash of diamonds in every spray, with a whisper in the awakening woods, and voices in the travelled roads and trails.

The sound of these voices stopped before the pit, and seemed to interrogate the old man. He came, and putting his finger on his lips, made a sign of caution. When three or four men had descended he bade them follow him, saying, weakly and disjointedly, but persistently, "My boy . . . my son Robert . . . came home . . . came home at last . . . here with Flip . . . both of them. . . . Come and see!"

He had reached a little niche or nest in the hillside, and stopped and suddenly drew aside a blanket. Beneath it, side by side, lay Flip and Lance, dead, with their cold hands clasped in each other's.

"Suffocated!" said two or three, turning with horror toward the broken-up and still smouldering pit.

"Asleep!" said the old man. "Asleep! I've seen 'em lying that way when they were babies together. Don't tell me! Don't say I don't know my own flesh and blood! So! so! So, my pretty ones!" He stooped and kissed them. Then drawing the blanket over them gently he rose and said softly, "Good night!"

Maruja.

CHAPTER I.

Morning was breaking on the high road to San José. The long lines of dusty, level track were beginning to extend their vanishing point in the growing light; on either side the awakening fields of wheat and oats were stretching out and broadening to the sky. In the east and south the stars were receding before the coming day; in the west a few still glimmered, caught among the bosky hills of the Cañada del Raimundo, where night seemed to linger. Thither some obscure, low-flying birds were slowly winging; thither a grey coyote, overtaken by the morning, was awkwardly limping. And thither a tramping wayfarer turned, ploughing through the dust of the highway still unslaked by the dewless night, to climb the fence and likewise seek the distant cover.

For some moments man and beast kept an equal pace and gait, with a strange similarity of appearance and expression; the coyote bearing that resemblance to his more civilised and harmless congener, the dog, which the tramp bore to the ordinary pedestrians, but both exhibiting the same characteristics of lazy vagabondage and semi-lawlessness; the coyote's slouching amble and uneasy stealthiness being repeated in the tramp's shuffling step and sidelong glances. Both were young and physically vigorous, but both displayed the same vacillating and awkward disinclination to direct effort. They continued thus half-a-mile apart, unconscious of each other, until the superior faculties of the brute warned him of the contiguity of aggressive civilisation, and

he cantered off suddenly to the right, fully five minutes before the barking of dogs caused the man to make a detour to the left to avoid entrance upon a cultivated domain that lay before him.

The trail he took led to one of the scant watercourses that issued, half spent, from the cañada, to fade out utterly on the hot June plain. It was thickly bordered with willows and alders, that made an arboured and feasible path through the dense woods and undergrowth. He continued along it as if aimlessly; stopping from time to time to look at different objects in a dull, mechanical fashion, as if rather to prolong his useless hours than from any curious instinct, and to occasionally dip in the unfrequent pools of water the few crusts of bread he had taken from his pocket. Even this appeared to be suggested more by a coincidence of material in the bread and water, than from the promptings of hunger. At last he reached a cup-like hollow in the hills lined with wild clover and thick with resinous odours. Here he crept under a manzanita bush and disposed himself to sleep. The act showed he was already familiar with the local habits of his class, who used the unfailing dry starlit nights for their wanderings, and spent the hours of glaring sunshine asleep or resting in some wayside shadow.

Meanwhile the light quickened, and gradually disclosed the form and outline of the adjacent domain. An avenue cut through a park-like wood, carefully cleared of the undergrowth of gigantic ferns peculiar to the locality, led to the entrance of the cañada. Here began a vast terrace of lawn, broken up by enormous bouquets of flower-beds bewildering in colour and profusion, from which again rose the flowering vines and trailing shrubs that hid pillars, verandah, and even the long façade of a great and dominant mansion. But the delicacy of floral outlines running to the capitals of columns and at times mounting to the pediment of the roof, the opulence of flashing colour or the massing

of tropical foliage, could not deprive it of the imperious dignity of size and space. Much of this was due to the fact that the original casa—an adobe house of no mean pretensions, dating back to the early Spanish occupation—had been kept intact, sheathed in a shell of dark-red wood, and still retaining its patio, or inner courtyard, surrounded by low galleries, while additions, greater in extent than the main building, had been erected—not as wings and projections, but massed upon it on either side, changing its rigid square outlines to a vague parallelogram. While the patio retained the Spanish conception of al fresco seclusion, a vast colonnade of verandah on the southern side was a concession to American taste, and its breadth gave that depth of shadow to the inner rooms which had been lost in the thinner shell of the new erection. Its cloistered gloom was lightened by the red fires of cardinal flowers dropping from the roof, by the yellow sunshine of the jessamine creeping up the columns, by billows of heliotropes, breaking over its base as a purple sea. Nowhere else did the opulence of this climate of blossoms show itself as vividly. Even the Castilian roses, that grew as vines along the east front, the fuchsias, that attained the dignity of trees, in the patio, or the four or five monster passion-vines that bestarred the low western wall, and told over and over again their mystic story—paled before the sensuous glory of the south verandah.

As the sun arose, that part of the quiet house first touched by its light seemed to waken. A few lounging peons and servants made their appearance at the entrance of the patio, occasionally reinforced by an earlier life from the gardens and stables. But the south façade of the building had not apparently gone to bed at all; lights were still burning dimly in the large ballroom; a tray with glasses stood upon the verandah near one of the open French windows, and further on a half-shut yellow fan lay like a fallen leaf. The sound of carriage-wheels on the

gravel terrace brought with it voices and laughter, and the swiftly-passing vision of a *char-à-bancs* filled with muffled figures bending low to avoid the direct advances of the sun.

As the carriage rolled away, four men lounged out of a window on the verandah, shading their eyes against the level beams. One was still in evening dress, and one in the uniform of a captain of artillery; the others had already changed their gala attire, the elder of the party having assumed those extravagant tweeds which the tourist from Great Britain usually offers as a gentle concession to inferior yet more florid civilisation. Nevertheless, he beamed back heartily on the sun, and remarked, in a pleasant Scotch accent, that: "Did they know it was very extraordinary how clear the morning was, so free from clouds and mist and fog?" The young man in evening dress fluently agreed to the facts, and suggested, in idiomatic French-English, that one comprehended that the bed was an insult to one's higher nature and an ingratitude to their gracious hostess, who had spread out this lovely garden and walks for their pleasure; that nothing was more beautiful than the dew sparkling on the rose, or the matin-song of the little birds.

The other young man here felt called upon to point out the fact that there was no dew in California, and that the birds did not sing in that part of the country. The foreign young gentleman received this statement with pain and astonishment as to the fact, with passionate remorse as to his own ignorance. But still, as it was a charming day, would not his gallant friend, the Captain here, accept the challenge of the brave Englishman, and "walk him" for the glory of his flag and a thousand pounds?

The gallant Captain, unfortunately, believed that if he walked out in his uniform he would suffer some delay from being interrogated by wayfarers as to the locality of the circus he would be pleasantly supposed to represent, even if he escaped being shot as a rare Californian bird by the

foreign sporting contingent. In these circumstances, he would simply lounge around the house until his carriage was ready.

Much as it pained him to withdraw from such amusing companions, the foreign young gentleman here felt that he, too, would retire for the present to change his garments, and glided back through the window at the same moment that the young officer carelessly stepped from the verandah and lounged towards the shrubbery.

"They've been watching each other for the last hour. I wonder what's up?" said the young man who remained.

The remark, without being confidential, was so clearly the first sentence of natural conversation that the Scotchman, although relieved, said, "Eh, man?" a little cautiously.

"It's as clear as this sunshine that Captain Carroll and Garnier are each particularly anxious to know what the other is doing or intends to do this morning."

"Why did they separate, then?" asked the other.

"That's a mere blind. Garnier's looking through his window now at Carroll, and Carroll is aware of it."

"Eh!" said the Scotchman, with good-humoured curiosity. "Is it a quarrel? Nothing serious, I hope. No revolvers and bowie-knives, man, before breakfast, eh?"

"No," laughed the younger man. "No! To do Maruja justice, she generally makes a fellow too preposterous to fight. I see you don't understand. You're a stranger; I'm an old *habitué* of the house—let me explain. Both of these men are in love with Maruja; or, worse than that, they firmly believe her to be in love with *them*."

"But Miss Maruja is the eldest daughter of our hostess, is she not?" said the Scotchman; "and I understood from one of the young ladies that the Captain had come down from the Fort particularly to pay court to Miss Amita, the beauty."

"Possibly. But that wouldn't prevent Maruja from flirting with him."

"Eh! but are you not mistaken, Mr. Raymond? Certainly a more quiet, modest, and demure young lassie I never met."

"That's because she sat out two waltzes with you, and let you do the talking, while she simply listened."

The elder man's fresh colour for an instant heightened, but he recovered himself with a good-humoured laugh. "Likely—likely. She's a capital good listener."

"You're not the first man that found her eloquent. Stanton, your banking friend, who never talks of anything but mines and stocks, says she's the only woman who has any conversation; and we can all swear that she never said two words to him the whole time she sat next to him at dinner. But she *looked* at him as if she had. Why, man, woman, and child all give her credit for any grace that pleases themselves. And why? Because she's clever enough not to practise any one of them—as graces. I don't know the girl that claims less, and gets more. For instance, you don't call her pretty?"——

"Wait a bit. Ye'll not get on so fast, my young friend; I'm not prepared to say that she's not," returned the Scotchman, with good-humoured yet serious caution.

"But you would have been prepared yesterday, and have said it. She can produce the effect of the prettiest girl here, and without challenging comparison. Nobody thinks of her—everybody experiences her."

"You're an enthusiast, Mr. Raymond. As an *habitué* of the house, of course, you"——

"Oh, my time came with the rest," laughed the young man, with unaffected frankness. "It's about two years ago now."

"I see; you were not a marrying man."

"Pardon me; it was because I was."

The Scotchman looked at him curiously.

"Maruja is an heiress. I am a mining engineer."

"But, my dear fellow, I thought that in your country"——

"In *my* country, yes. But we are standing on a bit of old Spain. This land was given to Doña Maria Saltonstall's ancestors by Charles V. Look around you. This verandah, this larger shell of the ancient casa, is the work of the old Salem whaling captain that she married, and is all that is American here. But the heart of the house, as well as the life that circles around the old patio, is Spanish. The Doña's family, the Estudiilos and Guitierrez, always looked down upon this alliance with the Yankee captain, though it brought improvement to the land, and increased its value forty-fold, and since his death ever opposed any further foreign intervention. Not that that would weigh much with Maruja if she took a fancy to any one; Spanish as she is throughout, in thought and grace and feature, there is enough of the old Salem witches' blood in her to defy law and authority in following an unhallowed worship. There are no sons; she is the sole heiress of the house and estate —though, according to the native custom, her sisters will be separately portioned from the other property, which is very large."

"Then the Captain might still make a pretty penny on Amita," said the Scotchman.

"If he did not risk and lose it all on Maruja. There is enough of the old Spanish jealousy in the blood to make even the gentle Amita never forgive his momentary defection."

Something in his manner made the Scotchman think that Raymond spoke from baleful experience. How else could this attractive young fellow, educated abroad, and a rising man in his profession, have failed to profit by his contiguity to such advantages, and the fact of his being an evident favourite?

"But with this opposition on the part of the relatives to any further alliances with your countrymen, why does our

hostess expose her daughters to their fascinating influence?" said the elder man, glancing at his companion. "The girls seem to have the usual American freedom."

"Perhaps they are therefore the less likely to give it up to the first man who asks them. But the Spanish duenna still survives in the family—the more awful because invisible. It's a mysterious fact that as soon as a fellow becomes particularly attached to any one—except Maruja—he receives some intimation from Pereo."

"What! the butler? That Indian-looking fellow? A servant?"

"Pardon me—the mayordomo. The old confidential servitor who stands *in loco parentis*. No one knows what he says. If the victim appeals to the mistress, she is indisposed; you know she has such bad health. If in his madness he makes a confidante of Maruja, that finishes him."

"How?"

"Why, he ends by transferring his young affections to her—with the usual result."

"Then you don't think our friend the Captain has had this confidential butler ask his intentions yet?"

"I don't think it will be necessary," said the other drily.

"Umph! Meantime the Captain has just vanished through yon shrubbery. I suppose that's the end of the mysterious espionage you have discovered. No! De'il take it! but there's that Frenchman popping out of the myrtle bush. How did the fellow get there? And, bless me! here's our lassie too!"

"Yes!" said Raymond, in a changed voice, "it's Maruja!"

She had approached so noiselessly along the bank that bordered the verandah, gliding from pillar to pillar as she paused before each to search for some particular flower, that both men felt an uneasy consciousness. But she betrayed no indication of their presence by look or gesture.

So absorbed and abstracted she seemed that, by a common instinct, they both drew nearer the window, and silently waited for her to pass or recognise them.

She halted a few paces off to fasten a flower in her girdle. A small youthful figure, in a pale yellow dress, lacking even the maturity of womanly outline. The full oval of her face, the straight line of her back, a slight boyishness in the contour of her hips, the infantine smallness of her sandalled feet and narrow hands, were all suggestive of fresh, innocent, amiable youth—and nothing more.

Forgetting himself, the elder man mischievously crushed his companion against the wall in mock virtuous indignation. "Eh, sir," he whispered, with an accent that broadened with his feelings. "Eh, but look at the puir wee lassie! Will ye no be ashamed o' yerself for putting the tricks of a Circe on sic an honest, gentle bairn? Why, man, you'll be seein' the sign of a limb of Satan in a bit thing with the mother's milk not yet out of her! She a flirt, speerin' at men, with that modest, downcast air? I'm ashamed of ye, Mister Raymond. She's only thinking of her breakfast, puir thing, and not of yon callant. Another sacrilegious word, and I'll expose you to her. Have ye no pity on youth and innocence?"

"Let me up," groaned Raymond feebly, "and I'll tell you how old she is. Hush—she's looking."

The two men straightened themselves. She had, indeed, lifted her eyes towards the window. They were beautiful eyes, and charged with something more than their own beauty. With a deep brunette setting even to the darkened cornea, the pupils were blue as the sky above them. But they were lit with another intelligence. The soul of the Salem whaler looked out of the passion-darkened orbits of the mother, and was resistless.

She smiled recognition of the two men with sedate girlishness, and a foreign inclination of the head over the flowers she was holding. Her straight, curveless mouth

became suddenly charming with the parting of her lips over her white teeth, and left the impress of the smile in a lighting of the whole face even after it had passed. Then she moved away. At the same moment Garnier approached her.

"Come away, man, and have our walk," said the Scotchman, seizing Raymond's arm. "We'll not spoil that fellow's sport."

"No; but she will, I fear. Look, Mr. Buchanan, if she hasn't given him her flowers to carry to the house while she waits here for the Captain!"

"Come away, scoffer!" said Buchanan good-humouredly, locking his arm in the young man's, and dragging him from the verandah towards the avenue, "and keep your observations for breakfast."

CHAPTER II.

In the meantime the young officer who had disappeared in the shrubbery, whether he had or had not been a spectator of the scene, exhibited some signs of agitation. He walked rapidly on, occasionally switching the air with a wand of willow from which he had impatiently plucked the leaves, through an alley of ceanothus until he reached a little thicket of evergreens, which seemed to oppose his further progress. Turning to one side, however, he quickly found an entrance to a labyrinthine walk, which led him at last to an open space and a rustic summer-house that stood beneath a gnarled and venerable pear-tree. The summer-house was a quaint stockade of dark madroño boughs thatched with redwood bark, strongly suggestive of deeper woodland shadow. But in strange contrast, the floor, table, and benches were thickly strewn with faded rose-leaves, scattered as if in some riotous play of children. Captain Carroll brushed them aside hurriedly with his impatient

foot, glanced around hastily, then threw himself on the rustic bench at full length, and twisted his moustache between his nervous fingers. Then he rose as suddenly, with a few white petals impaled on his gilded spurs, and stepped quickly into the open sunlight.

He must have been mistaken! Everything was quiet around him; the far-off sound of wheels in the avenue came faintly, but nothing more.

His eye fell upon the pear-tree, and even in his preoccupation he was struck with the signs of its extraordinary age. Twisted out of all proportion, and knotted with excrescences, it was supported by iron bands and heavy stakes, as if to prop up its senile decay. He tried to interest himself in the various initials and symbols deeply carved in bark, now swollen and half obliterated. As he turned back to the summer-house, he for the first time noticed that the ground rose behind it into a long undulation, on the crest of which the same singular profusion of rose-leaves were scattered. It struck him as being strangely like a gigantic grave, and that the same idea had occurred to the fantastic dispenser of the withered flowers. He was still looking at it, when a rustle in the undergrowth made his heart beat expectantly. A slinking grey shadow crossed the undulation and disappeared in the thicket. It was a coyote. At any other time the extraordinary appearance of this vivid impersonation of the wilderness, so near a centre of human civilisation and habitation, would have filled him with wonder. But he had room for only a single thought now. Would *she* come?

Five minutes passed. He no longer waited in the summer-house, but paced impatiently before the entrance to the labyrinth. Another five minutes. He was deceived, undoubtedly. She and her sisters were probably waiting for him and laughing at him on the lawn. He ground his heel into the clover, and threw his switch into the thicket. Yet he would give her *one*—only one moment more.

"Captain Carroll!"

The voice had been and was to *him* the sweetest in the world; but even a stranger could not have resisted the spell of its musical inflection. He turned quickly. She was advancing towards him from the summer-house.

"Did you think I was coming that way—where everybody could follow me?" she laughed softly. "No; I came through the thicket over there," indicating the direction with her flexible shoulder, "and nearly lost my slipper and my eyes—look!" She threw back the inseparable lace shawl from her blonde head, and showed a spray of myrtle clinging like a broken wreath to her forehead. The young officer remained gazing at her silently.

"I like to hear you speak my name," he said, with a slight hesitation in his breath. "Say it again."

"Car-roll, Car-roll, Car-roll," she murmured gently to herself two or three times, as if enjoying her own native trilling of the r's. "It's a pretty name. It sounds like a song. Don Carroll, eh! El Capitan Don Carroll."

"But my first name is Henry," he said faintly.

"'Enry—that's not so good. Don Enrico will do. But El Capitan Carroll is best of all. I must have it always: El Capitan Carroll!"

"Always?" He coloured like a boy.

"Why not?" He was confusedly trying to look through her brown lashes; she was parrying him with the steel of her father's glance. "Come! Well, Captain Carroll! It was not to tell me your name—that I knew already was pretty—Car-roll!" she murmured again, caressing him with her lashes; "it was not for this that you asked me to meet you face to face in this—cold"—she made a movement of drawing her lace over her shoulders—"cold daylight. That belonged to the lights and the dance and the music of last night. It is not for this you expect me to leave my guests, to run away from Monsieur Garnier, who pays compliments, but whose name is not pretty—from Mr. Raymond, who

talks *of* me when he can't talk *to* me. They will say, this Captain Carroll could say all that before them."

"But if they knew," said the young officer, drawing closer to her with a paling face but brightening eyes, "if they knew I had anything else to say, Miss Saltonstall—something—pardon me—did I hurt your hand?—something for *her* alone—is there one of them that would have the right to object? Do not think me foolish, Miss Saltonstall—but—I beg—I implore you to tell me before I say more."

"Who would have a right?" said Maruja, withdrawing her hand but not her dangerous eyes. "Who would dare forbid you talking to me of my sister? I have told you that Amita is free—as we all are."

Captain Carroll fell back a few steps, and gazed at her with a troubled face. "Is it possible that you have misunderstood, Miss Saltonstall?" he faltered. "Do you still think it is Amita that I"—— He stopped, and added passionately, "Do you remember what I told you?—have you forgotten last night?"

"Last night was—last night!" said Maruja, slightly lifting her shoulders. "One makes love at night—one marries in daylight. In the music, in the flowers, in the moonlight, one says everything; in the morning one has breakfast—when one is not asked to have councils of war with captains and commandantes. You would speak of my sister, Captain Car-roll—go on. Doña Amita Carroll sounds very, very pretty. I shall not object." She held out both her hands to him, threw her head back, and smiled.

He seized her hands passionately. "No, no! you shall hear me—you shall understand me. I love *you*, Maruja—you, and you alone. God knows I cannot help it—God knows I would not help it if I could. Hear me. I will be calm. No one can hear us where we stand. I am not mad. I am not a traitor! I frankly admired your sister. I came here to see her. Beyond that, I swear to you, I am guiltless to her—to you. Even she knows no more

of me than that. I saw you, Maruja. From that moment I have thought of nothing—dreamed of nothing else."

"That is—three, four, five days and one afternoon ago! You see, I remember. And now you want—what?"

"To let me love you, and you only. To let me be with you. To let me win you in time, as you should be won. I am not mad, though I am desperate. I know what is due to your station and mine—even while I dare to say I love you. Let me hope, Maruja, I only ask to hope."

She looked at him until she had absorbed all the burning fever of his eyes, until her ears tingled with his passionate voice, and then—she shook her head.

"It cannot be, Carroll—no! never!"

He drew himself up under the blow with such simple and manly dignity that her eyes dropped for the moment.

"There is another, then?" he said sadly.

"There is no one I care for better than you. No! Do not be foolish. Let me go. I tell you that because you can be nothing to me—you understand, to *me*. To my sister Amita, yes."

The young soldier raised his head coldly. "I have pressed you hard, Miss Saltonstall—too hard, I know, for a man who has already had his answer; but I did not deserve this. Good-bye."

"Stop," she said gently. "I meant not to hurt you, Captain Carroll. If I had, it is not thus I would have done. I need not have met you here. Would you have loved me the less if I had avoided this meeting?"

He could not reply. In the depths of his miserable heart, he knew that he would have loved her the same.

"Come," she said, laying her hand softly on his arm, "do not be angry with me for putting you back only five days to where you were when you first entered our house. Five days is not much of happiness or sorrow to forget, is it, Carroll—Captain Carroll?" Her voice died away in

a faint sigh. "Do not be angry with me, if—knowing you could be nothing more—I wanted you to love my sister, and my sister to love you. We should have been good friends—such good friends."

"Why do you say, 'Knowing it could be nothing more?'" said Carroll, grasping her hand suddenly. "In the name of Heaven, tell me what you mean!"

"I mean I cannot marry unless I marry one of my mother's race. That is my mother's wish, and the will of her relations. You are an American, not of Spanish blood."

"But surely this is not your determination?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "What would you? It is the determination of my people."

"But knowing this"—— He stopped; the quick blood rose to his face.

"Go on, Captain Carroll. You would say, Knowing this, why did I not warn you? Why did I not say to you when we first met, 'You have come to address my sister; do not fall in love with me—I cannot marry a foreigner?'"

"You are cruel, Maruja. But, if that is all, surely this prejudice can be removed? Why, your mother married a foreigner—an American."

"Perhaps that is why," said the girl quietly. She cast down her long lashes, and with the point of her satin slipper smoothed out the soft leaves of the clover at her feet. "Listen; shall I tell you the story of our house? Stop! some one is coming. Don't move; remain as you are. If you care for me, Carroll, collect yourself, and don't let that man think he has found *us* ridiculous." Her voice changed from its tone of slight caressing pleading to one of suppressed pride. "*He* will not laugh much, Captain Carroll; truly, no."

The figure of Garnier, bright, self-possessed, courteous, appeared at the opening of the labyrinth. Too well-bred to suggest, even in complimentary raillery, a possible senti-

mental situation, his politeness went further. It was so kind in them to guide an awkward stranger by their voices to the places where he could not stupidly intrude!

"You are just in time to interrupt or to hear a story that I have been threatening to tell," she said composedly; "an old Spanish legend of this house. You are in the majority now, you two, and can stop me if you choose. Thank you. I warn you it is stupid; it isn't new; but it has the excuse of being suggested by this very spot." She cast a quick look of subtle meaning at Carroll, and throughout her recital appealed more directly to him, in a manner delicately yet sufficiently marked to partly soothe his troubled spirit.

"Far back, in the very old times, caballeros," said Maruja, standing by the table in mock solemnity, and rapping upon it with her fan, "this place was the home of the coyote. Big and little, father and mother, Señor and Señora Coyotes, and the little muchacho coyotes, had their home in the dark cañada, and came out over these fields, yellow with wild oats and red with poppies, to seek their prey. They were happy. For why? They were the first; they had no history, you comprehend, no tradition. They married as they liked" (with a glance at Carroll), "nobody objected; they increased and multiplied. But the plains were fertile; the game was plentiful; it was not fit that it should be for the beasts alone. And so, in the course of time, an Indian chief, a heathen, Koorotora, built his wigwam here."

"I beg your pardon," said Garnier, in apparent distress, "but I caught the gentleman's name imperfectly."

Fully aware that the questioner only wished to hear again her musical enunciation of the consonants, she repeated "Koorotora" with an apologetic glance at Carroll, and went on. "This gentleman had no history or tradition to bother him either; whatever Señor Coyote thought of the matter, he contented himself with robbing Señor Koorotora's wigwam when he could, and skulking around the

Indian's camp at night. The old chief prospered, and made many journeys round the country, but always kept his camp here. This lasted until the time when the holy Fathers came from the South and Portala, as you have all read, uplifted the wooden cross on the sea-coast over there, and left it for the heathens to wonder at. Koorotora saw it on one of his journeys, and came back to the cañada full of this wonder. Now, Koorotora had a wife."

"Ah, we shall commence now. We are at the beginning. This is better than Señora Coyota," said Garnier cheerfully.

"Naturally, she was anxious to see the wonderful object. She saw it, and she saw the holy Fathers, and they converted her, against the superstitious, heathenish wishes of her husband. And more than that, they came here"——

"And converted the land also. Is it not so? It was a lovely site for a mission," interpolated Garnier politely.

"They built a mission, and brought as many of Koorotora's people as they could into the sacred fold. They brought them in in a queer fashion sometimes, it is said; dragoons from the Presidio, Captain Carroll, lassoing them and bringing them in at the tails of their horses. All except Koorotora. He defied them; he cursed them and his wife in his wicked heathenish fashion, and said that they too should lose the mission through the treachery of some woman, and that the coyote should yet prowl through the ruined walls of the church. The holy Fathers pitied the wicked man—and built themselves a lovely garden. Look at that pear-tree! There is all that is left of it!"

She turned with a mock heroic gesture, and pointed her fan to the pear-tree. Garnier lifted his hands in equally simulated wonder. A sudden recollection of the coyote of the morning recurred to Carroll uneasily. "And the Indians," he said, with an effort to shake off the feeling; "they too have vanished."

"All that remained of them is in yonder mound. It is the grave of the chief and his people. He never lived to

see the fulfilment of his prophecy. For it was a year after his death that our ancestor, Mañuel Guitierrez, came from old Spain to the Presidio with a grant of twenty leagues to settle where he chose. Doña Maria Guitierrez took a fancy to the cañada. But it was a site already in possession of the Holy Church. One night, through treachery, it was said, the guards were withdrawn, and the Indians entered the mission, slaughtered the lay brethren, and drove away the priests. The Commandant at the Presidio retook the place from the heathens, but on representation to the Governor that it was indefensible for the peaceful Fathers without a large military guard, the official ordered the removal of the mission to Santa Cruz, and Don Mañuel settled his twenty leagues' grant in the cañada. Whether he or Doña Maria had anything to do with the Indian uprising no one knows, but Father Pedro never forgave them. He is said to have declared at the foot of the altar that the curse of the Church was on the land, and that it should always pass into the hands of the stranger."

"And that was long ago, and the property is still in the family," said Carroll hurriedly, answering Maruja's eyes.

"In the last hundred years there have been no male heirs," continued Maruja, still regarding Carroll. "When my mother, who was the eldest daughter, married Don José Saltonstall against the wishes of the family, it was said that the curse would fall. Sure enough, caballeros, it was that year that the forged grants of Micheltorrena were discovered; and in our lawsuit your government, Captain, handed over ten leagues of the llano land to the Doctor West, our neighbour."

"Ah, the grey-headed gentleman who lunched here the other day? You are friends, then? You bear no malice?" said Garnier.

"What would you?" said Maruja, with a slight shrug of her shoulders. "He paid his money to the forger. Your

corregidores upheld him, and said it was no forgery," she continued, to Carroll.

In spite of the implied reproach, Carroll felt relieved. He began to be impatient of Garnier's presence, and longed to renew his suit. Perhaps his face showed something of this, for Maruja added, with mock demureness, "It's always dreadful to be the eldest sister; but think what it is to be in the direct line of a curse! Now, there's Amita —*she's* free to do as she likes, with no family responsibility; while poor me!" She dropped her eyes, but not until they had again sought and half-reproved the brightening eyes of Carroll.

"But," said Garnier, with a sudden change from his easy security and courteous indifference to an almost harsh impatience, "you do not mean to say, mademoiselle, that you have the least belief in this rubbish, this ridiculous canard?"

Maruja's straight mouth quickly tightened over her teeth. She shot a significant glance at Carroll, but instantly resumed her former manner.

"It matters little what a foolish girl like myself believes. The rest of the family, even the servants and children, all believe it. It is a part of their religion. Look at these flowers around the pear-tree and scattered on that Indian mound. They regularly find their way there on saints' days and festas. *They* are not rubbish, Monsieur Garnier; they are propitiatory sacrifices. Pereo would believe that a temblor would swallow up the casa if we should ever forego these customary rites. Is it a mere absurdity that forced my father to build these modern additions around the heart of the old adobe house, leaving it untouched, so that the curse might not be fulfilled even by implication?"

She had assumed an air of such pretty earnestness and passion; her satin face was illuminated as by some softly sensuous light within more bewildering than mere colour, that Garnier, all devoted eyes and courteous blandishment,

broke out—"But this curse must fall harmlessly before the incarnation of blessing; Miss Saltonstall has no more to fear than the angels. She is the one predestined through her charm, through her goodness, to lift it for ever."

Carroll could not have helped echoing the aspirations of his rival, had not the next words of his mistress thrilled him with superstitious terror.

"A thousand thanks, señor. Who knows? But I shall have warning when it falls. A day or two before the awful invader arrives, a coyote suddenly appears in broad daylight, mysteriously, near the casa. This midnight marauder, now banished to the thickest cañon, comes again to prowl around the home of his ancestors. Caramba! Señor Captain, what are you staring at? You frighten me! Stop it, I say!"

She had turned upon him, stamping her little foot in quite a frightened, childlike way.

"Nothing," laughed Carroll, the quick blood returning to his cheek. "But you must not be angry with one for being quite carried away with your dramatic intensity. By Jove! I thought I could see the *whole* thing while you were speaking; the old Indian, the priest, and the coyote!" His eyes sparkled. The wild thought had occurred to him that perhaps, in spite of himself, he was the young woman's predestined fate, and in the very selfishness of his passion he smiled at the mere material loss of lands and prestige that would follow it. "Then the coyote has always preceded some change in the family fortunes?" he asked boldly.

"On my mother's wedding-day," said Maruja in a lower voice, "after the party had come from church to supper in the old casa, my father asked, 'What dog is that under the table?' When they lifted the cloth to look, a coyote rushed from the very midst of the guests and dashed out across the patio. No one knew how or when he entered."

"Heaven grant that we do not find he has eaten our

breakfast!" said Garnier gaily, "for I judge it is waiting us. I hear your sister's voice among the others crossing the lawn. Shall we tear ourselves away from the tombs of our ancestors, and join them?"

"Not as I am looking now, thank you," said Maruja, throwing the lace over her head. "I shall not submit myself to a comparison of their fresher faces and toilettes by you two gentlemen. Go you both and join them. I shall wait and say an *Ave* for the soul of Koorotora, and slip back alone the way I came."

She had steadily evaded the pleading glance of Carroll; and though her bright face and unblemished toilette showed the inefficiency of her excuse, it was evident that her wish to be alone was genuine and without coquetry. They could only lift their hats and turn regretfully away.

As the red cap of the young officer disappeared amidst the evergreen foliage the young woman uttered a faint sigh, which she repeated a moment after as a slight nervous yawn. Then she opened and shut her fan once or twice, striking the sticks against her little pale palm, and then, gathering the lace under her oval chin with one hand and catching her fan and skirt with the other, bent her head and dipped into the bushes. She came out on the other side near a low fence, that separated the park from a narrow lane which communicated with the highroad beyond. As she neared the fence, a slinking figure limped along the lane before her. It was the tramp of the early morning.

They raised their heads at the same moment, and their eyes met. The tramp, in that clearer light, showed a spare but bent figure, roughly clad in a miner's shirt and canvas trousers, splashed and streaked with soil, and half hidden in a ragged blue cast-off army overcoat lazily hanging from one shoulder. His thin sunburnt face was not without a certain sullen suspicious intelligence, and a look of half-sneering defiance. He stopped, as a startled, surly animal might have stopped at some unusual object, but did not

exhibit any other discomposure. Maruja stopped at the same moment on her side of the fence.

The tramp looked at her deliberately, and then slowly lowered his eyes. "I'm looking for the San José road, hereabouts. Ye don't happen to know it?" he said, addressing himself to the top of the fence.

It had been said that it was not Maruja's way to encounter man, woman, or child, old or young, without an attempt at subjugation. Strong in her power and salient with fascination, she leaned gently over the fence, and with the fan raised to her delicate ear, made him repeat his question under the soft fire of her fringed eyes. He did so, but incompletely, and with querulous laziness.

"Lookin'—for—San José road—here'bouts."

"The road to San José," said Maruja, with gentle slowness, as if not unwilling to protract the conversation, "is about two miles from here. It is the highroad to the left fronting the plain. There is another way, if"——

"Don't want it! Mornin'."

He dropped his head suddenly forward, and limped away in the sunlight.

CHAPTER III.

Breakfast, usually a movable feast at La Mision Perdida, had been prolonged until past mid-day; the last of the dance guests had flown, and the home party—with the exception of Captain Carroll, who had returned to duty at his distant post—were dispersing; some as riding cavalcades to neighbouring points of interest; some to visit certain remarkable mansions which the wealth of a rapid civilisation had erected in that fertile valley. One of these in particular, the work of a breathless millionaire, was famous for the spontaneity of its growth and the reckless extravagance of its appointments.

"If you go to Aladdin's Palace," said Maruja, from the top step of the south porch, to a waggonette of guests, "after you've seen the stables with mahogany fittings for one hundred horses, ask Aladdin to show you the enchanted chamber, inlaid with California woods and paved with gold quartz."

"We would have a better chance if the Princess of China would only go with us," pleaded Garnier gallantly.

"The Princess will stay at home with her mother, like a good girl," returned Maruja demurely.

"A bad shot of Garnier's this time," whispered Raymond to Buchanan, as the vehicle rolled away with them. "The Princess is not likely to visit Aladdin again."

"Why?"

"The last time she was there, Aladdin was a little too Persian in his extravagance: offered her his house, stables, and himself."

"Not a bad catch—why, he's worth two millions, I hear."

"Yes; but his wife is as extravagant as himself."

"His *wife*, eh? Ah, are you serious; or must you say something derogatory of the lassie's admirers too?" said Buchanan, playfully threatening him with his cane. "Another word, and I'll throw you from the waggon."

After their departure, the outer shell of the great house fell into a profound silence, so hollow and deserted that one might have thought the curse of Koorotora had already descended upon it. Dead leaves of roses and fallen blossoms from the long line of vine-wreathed columns lay thick on the empty stretch of brown verandah, or rustled and crept against the sides of the house, where the regular breath of the afternoon "trades" began to arise. A few cardinal flowers fell like drops of blood before the open windows of the vacant ballroom, in which the step of a solitary servant echoed faintly. It was Maruja's maid, bringing a note to her young mistress, who, in a flounced

morning dress, leaned against the window. Maruja took it, glanced at it quietly, folded it in a long fold, and put it openly in her belt. Captain Carroll, from whom it came, might have carried one of his despatches as methodically. The waiting-woman noticed the act, and was moved to suggest some more exciting confidences.

"The Doña Maruja has, without doubt, noticed the bouquet on her dressing-room table from the Señor Garnier?"

The Doña Maruja had. The Doña Maruja had also learned with pain that, bribed by Judas-like coin, Faquita had betrayed the secrets of her wardrobe to the extent of furnishing a ribbon from a certain yellow dress to the Señor Buchanan to match with a Chinese fan. This was intolerable!

Faquita writhed in remorse, and averred that through this solitary act she had dishonoured her family.

The Doña Maruja, however, since it was so, felt that the only thing left to do was to give her the polluted dress, and trust that the devil might not fly away with her.

Leaving the perfectly-consoled Faquita, Maruja crossed the large hall, and, opening a small door, entered a dark passage through the thick adobe wall of the old casa, and apparently left the present century behind her. A peaceful atmosphere of the past surrounded her not only in the low vaulted halls terminating in grilles or barred windows; not only in the square chambers whose dark rich but scanty furniture was only a foil to the central elegance of the lace-bordered bed and pillows, but in a certain mysterious odour of dried and dessicated religious respectability that penetrated everywhere, and made the grateful twilight redolent of the generations of forgotten Guitierrez who had quietly exhaled in the old house. A mist as of incense and flowers that had lost their first bloom veiled the vista of the long corridor, and made the staring blue sky, seen through narrow windows and loopholes, glitter like mirrors let into

the walls. The chamber assigned to the young ladies seemed half oratory and half sleeping-room, with a strange mingling of the convent in the bare white walls, hung only with crucifixes and religious emblems, and of the seraglio in the glimpses of lazy figures, reclining in the deshabille of short silken saya, low camisa, and dropping slippers. In a broad angle of the corridor giving upon the patio, its balustrade hung with brightly-coloured serapes and shawls, surrounded by voluble domestics and relations, the mistress of the casa half reclined in a hammock and gave her noonday audience.

Maruja pushed her way through the clustered stools and cushions to her mother's side, kissed her on the forehead, and then lightly perched herself like a white dove on the railing. Mrs. Saltonstall, a dark, corpulent woman, redeemed only from coarseness by a certain softness of expression and refinement of gesture, raised her heavy brown eyes to her daughter's face.

"You have not been to bed, Mara?"

"No, dear. Do I look it?"

"You must lie down presently. They tell me that Captain Carroll returned suddenly this morning."

"Do you care?"

"Who knows? Amita does not seem to fancy José, Estéban, Jorge, or any of her cousins. She won't look at Juan Estudillo. The Captain is not bad. He is of the Government. He is"——

"Not more than ten leagues from here," said Maruja, playing with the Captain's note in her belt. "You can send for him, dear little mother. He will be glad."

"You will ever talk lightly—like your father! She was not, then, grieved—our Amita—eh?"

"She and Dorotea and the two Wilsons went off with Raymond and your Scotch friend in the waggonette. She did not cry—to Raymond."

"Good," said Mrs. Saltonstall, leaning back in her ham-

mock. "Raymond is an old friend. You had better take your siesta now, child, to be bright for dinner. I expect a visitor this afternoon—Dr. West."

"Again! What will Pereo say, little mother?"

"Pereo," said the widow, sitting up again in her hammock, with impatience; "Pereo is becoming intolerable. The man is as mad as Don Quixote; it is impossible to conceal his eccentric impertinence and interference from strangers, who cannot understand his confidential position in our house or his long service. There are no more mayordomos, child. The Vallejos, the Briones, the Castros, do without them now. Dr. West says wisely, they are ridiculous survivals of the patriarchal system."

"And can be replaced by intelligent strangers," interrupted Maruja demurely.

"The more easily if the patriarchal system has not been able to preserve the respect due from children to parents. No, Maruja! No; I am offended. Do not touch me! And your hair is coming down, and your eyes have rings like owls. You uphold this fanatical Pereo because he leaves *you* alone and stalks your poor sisters and their escorts like the Indian, whose blood is in his veins. The saints only can tell if he did not disgust this Captain Carroll into flight. He believes himself the sole custodian of the honour of our family—that he has a sacred mission from this Don Fulano of Koorotora to avert its fate. Without doubt he keeps up his delusions with aguardiente, and passes for a prophet among the silly peons and servants. He frightens the children with his ridiculous stories, and teaches them to decorate that heathen mound as if it were a shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows. He was almost rude to Dr. West yesterday."

"But you have encouraged him in his confidential position here," said Maruja. "You forget, my mother, how you got him to 'dueña' Enriquita with the Colonel Brown; how you let him frighten the young Englishman

who was too attentive to Dorotea; how you set him even upon poor Raymond, and failed so dismally that I had to take him myself in hand."

"But if I choose to charge him with explanations that I cannot make myself without derogating from the time-honoured hospitality of the casa, that is another thing. It is not," said Doña Maria, with a certain massive dignity that, inconsistent as it was with the weakness of her argument, was not without impressiveness. "It is not yet, Blessed Santa Maria, that we are obliged to take notice ourself of the pretensions of every guest beneath our roof, like the match-making, daughter-selling English and Americans. And *then* Pereo had tact and discrimination. Now he is mad! There are strangers and strangers. The whole valley is full of them—one can discriminate, since the old families year by year are growing less."

"Surely not," said Maruja innocently. "There is the excellent Ramierrez, who has lately almost taken him a wife from the singing-hall in San Francisco; he may yet be snatched from the fire. There is the youthful José Castro, the sole padroño of our national bull-fight at Soquel, the famous horsebreaker, and the winner of I know not how many races. And have we not Vincente Peralta, who will run, it is said, for the American Congress? He can read and write—truly I have a letter from him here." She turned back the folded slip of Captain Carroll's note and discovered another below.

Mrs. Saltonstall tapped her daughter's hand with her fan. "You jest at them, yet you uphold Pereo! Go, now, and sleep yourself into a better frame of mind. Stop! I hear the Doctor's horse. Run and see that Pereo receives him properly."

Maruja had barely entered the dark corridor when she came upon the visitor—a grey, hard-featured man of sixty—who had evidently entered without ceremony. "I see you did not wait to be announced," she said sweetly. "My

mother will be flattered by your impatience. You will find her in the patio."

"Pereo did not announce me, as he was probably still under the effect of the aguardiente he swallowed yesterday," said the Doctor drily. "I met him outside the Tienda on the highway the other night, talking to a pair of cut-throats that I would shoot on sight."

"The mayordomo has many purchases to make, and must meet a great many people," said Maruja. "What would you? We cannot select *his* acquaintances; we can hardly choose our own," she added sweetly.

The Doctor hesitated, as if to reply, and then, with a grim "Good morning," passed on towards the patio. Maruja did not follow him. Her attention was suddenly absorbed by a hitherto motionless figure, that seemed to be hiding in the shadow of an angle of the passage, as if waiting for her to pass. The keen eyes of the daughter of Joseph Saltonstall were not deceived. She walked directly towards the figure, and said sharply, "Pereo!"

The figure came hesitatingly forward into the light of the grated window. It was that of an old man, still tall and erect, though the hair had disappeared from his temples, and hung in two or three straight, long dark elf-locks on his neck. His face, over which one of the bars threw a sinister shadow, was the yellow of a dried tobacco-leaf, and veined as strongly. His garb was a strange mingling of the vaquero and the ecclesiastic—velvet trousers, open from the knee down, and fringed with bullion buttons; a broad red sash around his waist, partly hidden by a long straight chaqueta; with a circular sacerdotal cape of black broadcloth slipped over his head through a slit-like opening braided with gold. His restless yellow eyes fell before the young girl's, and the stiff, varnished, hard-brimmed sombrero he held in his wrinkled hands trembled.

"You are spying again, Pereo," said Maruja, in another

dialect than the one she had used to her mother. "It is unworthy of my father's trusted servant."

"It is that man—that coyote, Doña Maruja, that is unworthy of your father, of your mother, of *you!*" he gesticulated, in a fierce whisper. "I, Pereo, do not spy. I follow, follow the track of the prowling, stealing brute until I run him down. Yes, it was *I*, Pereo, who warned your father he would not be content with the half of the land he stole! It was I, Pereo, who warned your mother that each time he trod the soil of La Mision Perdida he measured the land he could take away!" He stopped pantingly, with the insane abstraction of a fixed idea glittering in his eyes.

"And it was *you*, Pereo," she said caressingly, laying her soft hand on his heaving breast, "*you* who carried me in your arms when I was a child. It was you, Pereo, who took me before you on your pinto horse to the rodeo, when no one knew it but ourselves, my Pereo, was it not?" He nodded his head violently. "It was you who showed me the gallant caballeros, the Pachecos, the Castros, the Alvarados, the Estudillos, the Peraltas, the Vallejos." His head kept time with each name as the fire dimmed in his wet eyes. "You made me promise I would not forget them for the Americanos who were here. Good! that was years ago! I am older now. I have seen many Americans. Well, I am still free!"

He caught her hand, and raised it to his lips with a gesture almost devotional. His eyes softened; as the exaltation of passion passed, his voice dropped into the querulousness of privileged age. "Ah yes!—you, the first-born, the heiress—of a verity, yes! You were ever a Guitierrez. But the others? Eh, where are they now? And it was always, 'Eh, Pereo, what shall we do to-day? Pereo, good Pereo, we are asked to ride here and there; we are expected to visit the new people in the valley—what say you, Pereo? Who shall we dine to-day?' Or,

'Enquire me of this or that strange caballero; and if we may speak.' Ah, it is but yesterday that Amita would say, 'Lend me thine own horse, Pereo, that I may outstrip this swaggering Americano that clings ever to my side,' ha! ha! Or the grave Dorotea would whisper, 'Convey to this Señor Presumptuous Pomposo that the daughters of Guitierrez do not ride alone with strangers!' Or even the little Liseta would say, he! he! 'Why does the stranger press my foot in his great hand when he helps me into the saddle? Tell him that is not the way, Pereo.' Ha, ha!" He laughed childishly, and stopped. "And why does Señorita Amita now—look—complain that Pereo, old Pereo, comes between her and this Señor Raymond—the maquinista? Eh, and why does *she*, the lady mother, the Castellaña, shut Pereo from her councils?" he went on, with rising excitement. "What are these secret meetings, eh?—what these appointments, alone with this Judas—without the family—without *me!*"

"Hearken, Pereo," said the young girl, again laying her hand on the old man's shoulder; "you have spoken truly—but you forget—the years pass. These are no longer strangers; old friends have gone—these have taken their place. My father forgave the Doctor—why cannot you? For the rest, believe in me—me—Maruja"—she dramatically touched her heart over the international complications of the letters of Captain Carroll and Peralta. "I will see that the family honour does not suffer. And now, good Pereo, calm thyself. Not with aguardiente, but with a bottle of old wine from the Mision refectory that I will send to thee. It was given to me by thy friend, Padre Miguel, and is from the old vines that were here. Courage, Pereo! And thou sayest that Amita complains that thou comest between her and Raymond. So! What matter? Let it cheer thy heart to know that I have summoned the Peraltas, the Pachecos, the Estudillos, all thy old friends, to dine here to-day. Thou wilt hear the old names, even

if the faces are young to thee. Courage! Do thy duty, old friend; let them see that the hospitality of La Mision Perdida does not grow old, if its mayordomo does. Faquita will bring thee the wine. No, not *that* way; thou needest not pass the patio, nor meet that man again. Here, give me thy hand, I will lead thee. It trembles, Pereo! These are not the sinews that only two years ago pulled down the bull at Soquel with thy single lasso! Why, look! I can drag thee; see!" and with a light laugh and a boyish gesture, she half pulled, half dragged him along, until their voices were lost in the dark corridor.

Maruja kept her word. When the sun began to cast long shadows along the verandah, not only the outer shell of La Mision Perdida, but the dark inner heart of the old casa, stirred with awakened life. Single horsemen and carriages began to arrive; and, mingled with the modern turn-outs of the home party and the neighbouring Americans, were a few of the cumbrous vehicles and chariots of fifty years ago, drawn by gaily trapped mules with bizarre postillions, and occasionally an outrider. Dark faces looked from the balcony of the patio, a light cloud of cigarette-smoke made the dark corridors the more obscure, and mingled with the forgotten incense. Bare-headed, pretty women, with roses starring their dark hair, wandered with childish curiosity along the broad verandah and in and out of the French windows that opened upon the grand saloon. Scrupulously shaved men with olive complexion, stout men with accurately curving whiskers meeting at their dimpled chins, lounged about with a certain unconscious dignity that made them contentedly indifferent to any novelty of their surroundings. For a while the two races kept mechanically apart; but, through the tactful gallantry of Garnier, the cynical familiarity of Raymond, and the impulsive recklessness of Aladdin, who had forsaken his enchanted Palace on the slightest of invitations, and returned with the party in the hope of again seeing the Princess

of China, an interchange of civilities, of gallantries, and even of confidences, at last took place. Jovita Castro had heard (who had not?) of the wonders of Aladdin's Palace, and was it of actual truth that the ladies had a bouquet and a fan to match their dress presented to them every morning, and that the gentlemen had a champagne cocktail sent to their rooms before breakfast? "Just you come, miss, and bring your father and your brothers, and stay a week, and you'll see," responded Aladdin gallantly. "Hold on! What's your father's first name? I'll send a team over there for you to-morrow." "And is it true that you frightened the handsome Captain Carroll away from Amita?" said Dolores Briones, over the edge of her fan, to Raymond. "Perfectly," said Raymond, with ingenuous frankness. "I made it a matter of life or death. He was a soldier, and naturally preferred the former as giving him a better chance for promotion." "Ah! we thought it was Maruja you liked best." "That was two years ago," said Raymond gravely. "And you Americanos can change in that time?" "I have just experienced that it can be done in less," he responded, over the fan, with bewildering significance. Nor were these confidences confined to only one nationality. "I always thought you Spanish gentlemen were very dark, and wore long moustaches and a cloak," said pretty little Miss Walker, gazing frankly into the smooth round face of the eldest Pacheco—"why, you are as fair as I am." "Eaf I tink that, I am for ever mizzarable," he replied, with grave melancholy. In the dead silence that followed he was enabled to make his decorous point. "Because I shall not ezcape ze fate of Narcissus." Mr. Buchanan, with the unrestrained and irresponsible enjoyment of a traveller, entered fully into the spirit of the scene. He even found words of praise for Aladdin, whose extravagance had at first seemed to him almost impious. "Eh, but I'm not prepared to say he is a fool, either," he remarked to his friend the San Francisco banker. "Those

who try to pick him up for one," returned the banker, "will find themselves mistaken. His is the prodigality that loosens others' purse-strings besides his own. Everybody contents himself with criticising his way of spending money, but is ready to follow his way of making it."

The dinner was more formal, and when the mistress of the house, massive in black silk, velvet, and gold embroidery, moved like a pageant to the head of her table, where she remained like a sacerdotal effigy, not even the presence of the practical Scotchman at her side could remove the prevailing sense of restraint. For a while the conversation of the relatives might have been brought with them in their antique vehicles of fifty years ago, so faded, so worn, and so springless it was. General Pico related the festivities at Monterey, on the occasion of the visit of Sir George Simpson early in the present century, of which he was an eyewitness, with great precision of detail. Don Juan Estudillo was comparatively frivolous, with anecdotes of Louis Philippe, whom he had seen in Paris. Far-seeing Pedro Guitierrez was gloomily impressed with a Mongolian invasion of California by the Chinese, in which the prevailing religion would be supplanted by heathen temples, and polygamy engrafted on the Constitution. Everybody agreed, however, that the vital question of the hour was the settlement of land titles—Americans who claimed under pre-emption and the native holders of Spanish grants were equally of the opinion. In the midst of this the musical voice of Maruja was heard asking, "What is a tramp?"

Raymond, on her right, was ready but not conclusive. A tramp, if he could sing, would be a troubadour; if he could pray, would be a pilgrim friar—in either case a natural object of womanly solicitude. But as he could do neither, he was simply a curse.

"And you think that is not an object of womanly solicitude? But that does not tell me *what* he is."

A dozen gentlemen, swept in the radius of those softly

inquiring eyes, here started to explain. From them it appeared that there was no such thing in California as a tramp, and there were also a dozen varieties of tramp in California.

"But is he always very uncivil?" asked Maruja.

Again there were conflicting opinions. You might have to shoot him on sight, and you might have him invariably run from you. When the question was finally settled, Maruja was found to have become absorbed in conversation with some one else.

Amita, a taller copy of Maruja, and more regularly beautiful, had built up a little pile of bread-crumbs between herself and Raymond, and was listening to him with a certain shy, girlish interest that was as inconsistent with the serene regularity of her face as Maruja's self-possessed, subtle intelligence was incongruous to her youthful figure. Raymond's voice, when he addressed Amita, was low and earnest; not from any significance of matter, but from its frank, confidential quality.

"They are discussing the new railroad project, and your relations are all opposed to it; to-morrow they will each apply privately to Aladdin for the privilege of subscribing."

"I have never seen a railroad," said Amita, slightly colouring; "but you are an engineer, and I know they must be something very clever."

Notwithstanding the coolness of the night, a full moon drew the guests to the verandah, where coffee was served, and where, mysteriously muffled in cloaks and shawls, the party took upon itself the appearance of groups of dominoed masqueraders, scattered along the verandah and on the broad steps of the porch in gipsy-like encampments, from whose cloaked shadow the moonlight occasionally glittered upon a varnished boot or peeping satin slipper. Two or three of these groups had resolved themselves into detached couples, who wandered down the acacia walk to the sound of a harp in the grand saloon or the occasional

uplifting of a thin Spanish tenor. Two of these couples were Maruja and Garnier, followed by Amita and Raymond.

"You are restless to-night, Maruja," said Amita, shyly endeavouring to make a show of keeping up with her sister's boyish stride, in spite of Raymond's reluctance. "You are paying for your wakefulness to-day."

The same idea passed through the minds of both men. She was missing the excitement of Captain Carroll's presence.

"The air is so refreshing away from the house," responded Maruja, with a bright energy that belied any suggestion of fatigue or moral disquietude. "I'm tired of running against those turtle-doves in the walks and bushes. Let us keep on to the lane. If you are tired, Mr. Raymond will give you his arm."

They kept on, led by the indomitable little figure who, for once, did not seem to linger over the attentions, both piquant and tender, with which Garnier improved his opportunity. Given a shadowy lane, a lovers' moon, a pair of bright and not unkindly eyes, a charming and not distant figure—what more could he want? Yet he wished she hadn't walked so fast. One might be vivacious, audacious, brilliant, at an Indian trot; but impassioned—never! The pace increased; they were actually hurrying. More than that, Maruja had struck into a little trot; her lithe body swaying from side to side, her little feet straight as an arrow before her; accompanying herself with a quaint musical chant, which she obligingly explained had been taught her as a child by Pereo. They stopped only at the hedge, where she had that morning encountered the tramp.

There is little doubt that the rest of the party was disconcerted: Amita, whose figure was not adapted to this Camilla-like exercise; Raymond, who was annoyed at the poor girl's discomfiture; and Garnier, who had lost a golden opportunity, with the faint suspicion of having looked

ridiculous. Only Maruja's eyes, or rather the eyes of her lamented father, seemed to enjoy it.

"You are too effeminate," she said, leaning against the fence, and shading her eyes with her fan, as she glanced around in the staring moonlight. "Civilisation has taken away your legs. A man ought to be able to trust to his feet all day, and to nothing else."

"In fact—a tramp," suggested Raymond.

"Possibly. I think I should like to have been a gipsy, and to have wandered about, finding a new home every night."

"And a change of linen on the early morning hedges," said Raymond. "But do you think seriously that you and your sister are suitably clad to commence to-night? It is bitterly cold," he added, turning up his collar. "Could you begin by showing a pal the nearest haystack or hen-roost?"

"Sybarite!" She cast a long look over the fields and down the lane. Suddenly she started. "What is that?"

She pointed to a tall, erect figure slowly disappearing on the other side of the hedge.

"It's Pereo, only Pereo. I knew him by his long serape," said Garnier, who was nearest the hedge, complacently. "But what is surprising, he was not there when we came, nor did he come out of that open field. He must have been walking behind us on the other side of the hedge."

The eyes of the two girls sought each other simultaneously, but not without Raymond's observant glance. Amita's brow darkened as she moved to her sister's side, and took her arm with a confidential pressure that was returned. The two men, with a vague consciousness of some *contre-temps*, dropped a pace behind, and began to talk to each other, leaving the sisters to exchange a few words in a low tone as they slowly returned to the house.

Meanwhile, Pereo's tall figure had disappeared in the shrubbery, to emerge again in the open area by the

summer-house and the old pear tree. The red sparks of two or three cigarettes in the shadow of the summer-house, and the crouching forms of two shawled women, came forward to greet him.

"And what hast thou heard, Pereo?" said one of the women.

"Nothing," said Pereo impatiently. "I told thee I would answer for this little primogenita with my life. She is but leading this Frenchman a dance, as she has led the others, and the Doña Amita and her Raymond are but wax in her hands. Besides, I have spoken with the little 'Ruja to-day, and spoke my mind, Pepita, and she says there is nothing."

"And whilst thou wert speaking to her, my poor Pereo, the devil of an American Doctor was speaking to her mother, thy mistress—our mistress, Pereo! Wouldst thou know what he said? Oh, it was nothing."

"Now, the curse of Koorotora on thee, Pepita!" said Pereo excitedly. "Speak, fool, if thou knowest anything!"

"Of a verity, no. Let Faquita, then, speak: she heard it." She reached out her hand, and dragged Maruja's maid, not unwilling, before the old man.

"Good! 'Tis Faquita, daughter of Gomez, and a child of the land. Speak, little one. What said this coyote to the mother of thy mistress?"

"Truly, good Pereo, it was but accident that befriended me."

"Truly, for thy mistress's sake, I hoped it had been more. But let that go. Come, what said he, child?"

"I was hanging up a robe behind the curtain in the oratory when Pepita ushered in the Americano. I had no time to fly."

"Why shouldst thou fly from a dog like this?" said one of the cigarette-smokers who had drawn near.

"Peace!" said the old man.

"When the Doña Maria joined him they spoke of affairs. Yes, Pereo, she, thy mistress, spoke of affairs to this man —ay, as she might have talked to *thee.* And could he advise this? and could he counsel that? and should the cattle be taken from the lower lands, and the fields turned to grain? and had he a purchaser for Los Osos?"

"Los Osos! It is the boundary land—the frontier—the line of the arroyo—older than the Mision," muttered Pereo.

"Ay, and he talked of the—the—I know not what it is! —the r-r-rail-r-road."

"The railroad!" gasped the old man. "I will tell thee what it is. It is the cut of a burning knife through La Mision Perdida—as long as eternity, as dividing as death. On either side of that gash life is blasted; wherever that cruel steel is laid the track of it is livid and barren; it cuts down all barriers; leaps all boundaries, be they cañada or cañon; it is a torrent in the plain, a tornado in the forest; its very pathway is destruction to whoso crosses it—man or beast; it is the heathenish God of the Americanos; they build temples for it, and flock there and worship it whenever it stops, breathing fire and flame like a very Moloch."

"Eh! St. Anthony preserve us!" said Faquita, shuddering; "and yet they spoke of it as 'shares' and 'stocks,' and said it would double the price of corn."

"Now, Judas pursue thee and thy railroad, Pereo," said Pepita impatiently. "It is not such bagatela that Faquita is here to relate. Go on, child, and tell all that happened."

"And then," continued Faquita, with a slight affectation of maiden bashfulness, in the closer-drawing circle of cigarettes, "and then they talked of other things and of themselves; and, of a verity, this grey-bearded Doctor will play the goat and utter gallant speeches, and speak of a life-long devotion and of the time he should have a right to protect"——

FREESE LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY CALIFORNIA

"The right, girl! Didst thou say the right? No, thou didst mistake. It was not *that* he meant?"

"Thy life to a quarter peso that the little Faquita does not mistake," said the evident satirist of the household. "Trust to Gomez' muchacha to understand a proposal."

When the laugh was over, and the sparks of the cigaretto, cleverly whipped out of the speaker's lips by Faquita's fan, had disappeared in the darkness, she resumed, pettishly, "I know not what you call it when he kissed her hand and held it to his heart."

"Judas!" gasped Pereo. "But," he added feverishly, "she, the Doña Maria, thy mistress, *she* summoned thee at once to call me to cast out this dust into the open air; thou didst fly to her assistance? What! thou sawest this, and did nothing—eh?" He stopped, and tried to peer into the girl's face. "No! Ah, I see; I am an old fool. Yes; it was Maruja's own mother that stood there. He! he! he!" he laughed piteously; "and she smiled and smiled and broke the coward's heart, as Maruja might. And when he was gone, she bade thee bring her water to wash the filthy Judas stain from her hand."

"Santa Ana!" said Faquita, shrugging her shoulders. "She did what the veriest muchacha would have done. When he had gone, she sat down and cried."

The old man drew back a step, and steadied himself by the table. Then, with a certain tremulous audacity, he began: "So! that is all you have to tell—nothing! Bah! A lazy slut sleeps at her duty, and dreams behind a curtain! Yes, dreams!—you understand—*dreams!* And for this she leaves her occupations, and comes to gossip here! Come," he continued, steadily working himself into a passion, "come, enough of this! Get you gone!—you, and Pepita, and Andreas, and Victor—all of you—back to your duty. Away! Am I not master here? Off! I say!"

There was no mistaking the rising anger of his voice.

The cowed group rose in a frightened way and disappeared one by one silently through the labyrinth. Pereo waited until the last had vanished, and then, cramming his stiff sombrero over his eyes with an ejaculation, brushed his way through the shrubbery in the direction of the stables.

Later, when the full glory of the midnight moon had put out every straggling light in the great house, when the long verandah slept in massive bars of shadow, and even the trade winds were hushed to repose, Pereo silently issued from the stable-yard in vaquero's dress, mounted and caparisoned. Picking his way cautiously along the turf-bordered edge of the gravel path, he noiselessly reached a gate that led to the lane. Walking his spirited mustang with difficulty until the house had at last disappeared in the intervening foliage, he turned with an easy canter into a border bridle-path that seemed to lead to the cañada. In a quarter of an hour he had reached a low amphitheatre of meadows, shut in a half-circle of grassy treeless hills.

Here, putting spurs to his horse, he entered upon a singular exercise. Twice he made a circuit of the meadow at a wild gallop, with flying serape and loosened rein, and twice returned. The third time his speed increased, the ground seemed to stream from under him; in the distance the limbs of his steed became invisible in their furious action, and, lying low forward on his mustang's neck, man and horse passed like an arrowy bolt around the circle. Then something like a light ring of smoke up-curved from the saddle before him, and, slowly uncoiling itself in mid air, dropped gently to the ground as he passed. Again, and once again, the shadowy coil sped upward and onward, slowly detaching its snaky rings with a weird deliberation that was in strange contrast to the impetuous onset of the rider, and yet seemed a part of his fury. And then turning, Pereo trotted gently to the centre of the circle.

Here he divested himself of his serape, and securing it in a cylindrical roll, placed it upright on the ground, and once

more sped away on his furious circuit. But this time he wheeled suddenly before it was half completed, and bore down directly upon the unconscious object. Within a hundred feet he swerved slightly; the long detaching rings again writhed in mid air, and softly descended as he thundered past. But when he had reached the line of circuit again he turned, and made directly for the road he had entered. Fifty feet behind his horse's heels, at the end of a shadowy cord, the luckless serape was dragging and bounding after him!

"The old man is quiet enough this morning," said Andreas, as he groomed the sweat-dried skin of the mustang the next day. "It is easy to see, friend Pinto, that he has worked off his madness on thee."

CHAPTER IV.

THE Rancho of San Antonio might have been a characteristic asylum for its blessed patron, offering as it did a secure retreat from temptations for the carnal eye, and affording every facility for uninterrupted contemplation of the sky above, unbroken by tree or elevation. Unlike La Mision Perdida, of which it had been part, it was a level plain of rich adobe, half the year presenting a billowy sea of tossing verdure breaking on the far-off horizon line, half the year presenting a dry and dusty shore, from which the vernal sea had ebbed, to the low sky that seemed to mock it with a visionary sea beyond. A row of rough, irregular, and severely practical sheds and buildings housed the machinery and the fifty or sixty men employed in the cultivation of the soil, but neither residential mansion nor farmhouse offered any nucleus of rural comfort or civilisation in the midst of this wild expanse of earth and sky. The simplest adjuncts of country life were

unknown: milk and butter were brought from the nearest town; weekly supplies of fresh meat and vegetables came from the same place; in the harvest season, the labourers and harvesters lodged and boarded in the adjacent settlement, and walked to their work. No cultivated flower bloomed beside the unpainted tenement, though the fields were starred in early spring with poppies and daisies—the humblest garden plant or herb had no place in that prolific soil. The serried ranks of wheat pressed closely round the straggling sheds and barns and hid the lower windows. But the sheds were fitted with the latest agricultural machinery; a telegraphic wire connected the nearest town with an office in the wing of one of the buildings, where Dr. West sat, and in the midst of the wilderness severely checked his accounts with nature.

Whether this strict economy of domestic outlay arose from an ostentatious contempt of country life and the luxurious habits of the former landholders, or whether it was a purely business principle of Dr. West, did not appear. Those who knew him best declared that it was both. Certain it was that unqualified commercial success crowned and dignified his method. A few survivors of the old native families came to see his strange machinery that did the work of so many idle men and horses. It is said that he offered to "run" the distant estate of Joaquin Padilla from his little office amidst the grain of San Antonio. Some shook their heads, and declared that he only sucked the juices of the land for a few brief years to throw it away again; that in his fierce haste he skimmed the fatness of ages of gentle cultivation on a soil that had been barely tickled with native oaken ploughshares.

His own personal tastes and habits were as severe and practical as his business; the little wing he inhabited contained only his office, his living room or library, his bedroom, and a bath-room. This last inconsistent luxury

was due to a certain cat-like cleanliness which was part of his nature. His iron-grey hair — a novelty in this country of young Americans — was always scrupulously brushed, and his linen spotless. A slightly professional and somewhat old-fashioned respectability in his black clothes was also characteristic. His one concession to the customs of his neighbours was the possession of two or three of the half-broken and spirited mustangs of the country, which he rode with the fearlessness, if not the perfect security and ease, of a native. Whether the subjection of this lawless and powerful survival of a wild and unfettered nature around him was part of his plan, or whether it was only a lingering trait of some younger prowess, no one knew; but his grim and decorous figure, contrasting with the picturesque and flowing freedom of the horse he bestrode, was a frequent spectacle in road and field.

It was the second day after his visit to La Mision Perdida. He was sitting by his desk at sunset in the faint afterglow of the western sky, which flooded the floor through the open door. He was writing, but presently lifted his head with an impatient air, and called out, "Harrison!"

The shadow of Dr. West's foreman appeared at the door.

"Who's that you're talking to?"

"Tramp, sir."

"Hire him, or send him about his business. Don't stand gabbling there."

"That's just it, sir. He won't hire for a week or a day. He says he'll do an odd job for his supper and a shake-down, but no more."

"Pack him off! . . . Stay. . . . What's he like?"

"Like the rest of 'em; only a little lazier, I reckon."

"Umph! Fetch him in."

The foreman disappeared, and returned with the tramp already known to the reader. He was a little dirtier and

grimier than on the morning he had addressed Maruja at La Mision Perdida; but he wore the same air of sullen indifference, occasionally broken by furtive observation. His laziness—or weariness, if the term could describe the lassitude of perfect physical condition—seemed to have increased; and he leaned against the door as the Doctor regarded him with slow contempt. The silence continuing, he deliberately allowed himself to slip down into a sitting position in the doorway, where he remained.

"You seem to have been born tired," said the Doctor grimly.

"Yes."

"What have you got to say for yourself?"

"I told *him*," said the tramp, nodding his head towards the foreman, "what I'd do for a supper and a bed. I don't want anything but that."

"And if you don't get what you want on your own conditions, what'll you do?" asked the Doctor drily.

"Go."

"Where did you come from?"

"States."

"Where are you going?"

"On."

"Leave him to me," said Dr. West to his foreman. The man smiled, and withdrew.

The Doctor bent his head again over his accounts. The tramp, sitting in the doorway, reached out his hand, pulled a young wheatstalk that had sprung up near the doorstep, and slowly nibbled it. He did not raise his eyes to the Doctor, but sat, a familiar culprit awaiting sentence, without fear, without hope, yet not without a certain philosophical endurance of the situation.

"Go into that passage," said the Doctor, lifting his head as he turned a page of his ledger, "and on the shelf you'll find some clothing stores for the men. Pick out something to fit you."

The tramp arose, moved towards the passage, and stopped. "It's for the job only, you understand?" he said.

"For the job," answered the Doctor.

The tramp returned in a few moments with overalls and woollen shirt hanging on his arm and a pair of boots and socks in his hand. The Doctor had put aside his pen. "Now go into that room and change. Stop! First wash the dust from your feet in that bath-room."

The tramp obeyed, and entered the room. The Doctor walked to the door, and looked out reflectively on the paling sky. When he turned again he noticed that the door of the bath-room was opened, and the tramp, who had changed his clothes by the fading light, was drying his feet. The Doctor approached, and stood for a moment watching him.

"What's the matter with your foot?"* he asked, after a pause.

"Born so."

The first and second toe were joined by a thin membrane.

"Both alike?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes," said the young man, exhibiting the other foot.

"What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say it. It's Henry Guest, same as my father's."

"Where were you born?"

"Dentville, Pike County, Missouri."

"What was your mother's name?"

"Spalding, I reckon."

"Where are your parents now?"

"Mother got divorced from father, and married again down South, somewhere. Father left home twenty years ago. He's somewhere in California—if he ain't dead."

* This apparent classical plagiarism is actually a fact of identification on record in the California Law Reports. It is therefore unnecessary for me to add that the attendant circumstances and characters are purely fictitious.—B. H.

"He isn't dead."

"How do you know?"

"Because I am Henry Guest, of Dentville: and"—he stopped, and shading his eyes with his hand as he deliberately examined the tramp, added coldly—"your father, I reckon."

There was a slight pause. The young man put down the boot he had taken up. "Then I'm to stay here?"

"Certainly not. Here my name is only West, and I have no son. You'll go on to San José, and stay there until I look into this thing. You haven't got any money, of course?" he asked, with a scarcely suppressed sneer.

"I've got a little," returned the young man.

"How much?"

The tramp put his hand into his breast, and drew out a piece of folded paper containing a single gold coin.

"Five dollars. I've kept it a month; it doesn't cost much to live as I do," he added drily.

"There's fifty more. Go to some hotel in San José, and let me know where you are. You've got to live, and you don't want to work. Well, you don't seem to be a fool; so I needn't tell you that if you expect anything from me, you must leave this matter in my hands. I have chosen to acknowledge you to-day of my own free will—I can as easily denounce you as an impostor to-morrow, if I choose. Have you told your story to any one in the valley?"

"No."

"See that you don't, then. Before you go, you must answer me a few more questions."

He drew a chair to his table, and dipped a pen in the ink, as if to take down the answers. The young man, finding the only chair thus occupied, moved the Doctor's books aside, and sat dawn on the table beside him.

The questions were repetitions of those already asked, but more in detail, and thoroughly practical in their nature. The answers were given straightforwardly and unconcernedly,

as if the subject was not worth the trouble of invention or evasion. It was difficult to say whether questioner or answerer took least pleasure in the interrogation, which might have referred to the concerns of a third party. Both, however, spoke disrespectfully of their common family with almost an approach to sympathetic interest.

"You might as well be going now," said the Doctor, finally rising. "You can stop at the fonda, about two miles further on, and get your supper and bed, if you like."

The young man slipped from the table, and lounged to the door. The Doctor put his hands in his pockets and followed him. The young man, as if in unconscious imitation, had put *his* hands in his pockets also, and looked at him.

"I'll hear from you, then, when you are in San José?" said Dr. West, looking past him into the grain with a slight approach to constraint in his indifference.

"Yes—if that's agreed upon," returned the young man, pausing on the threshold. A faint sense of some purely conventional responsibility in their position affected them both. They would have shaken hands if either had offered the initiative. A sullen consciousness of gratuitous rectitude in the selfish mind of the father; an equally sullen conviction of twenty years of wrong in the son, withheld them both. Unpleasantly observant of each other's awkwardness, they parted with a feeling of relief.

Dr. West closed the door, lit his lamp, and, going to his desk, folded the paper containing the memoranda he had just written and placed it in his pocket. Then he summoned his foreman. The man entered, and glanced around the room as if expecting to see the Doctor's guest still there.

"Tell one of the men to bring round Buckeye."

The foreman hesitated. "Going to ride to-night, sir?"

"Certainly; I may go as far as Saltonstall's. If I do, you needn't expect me back till morning."

"Buckeye's mighty fresh to-night, boss. Regularly

bucked his saddle clean off an hour ago, and there ain't a man dare exercise him."

"I'll bet he don't buck his saddle off with me on it," said the Doctor grimly. "Bring him along."

The man turned to go. "You found the tramp pow'ful lazy, didn't ye?"

"I found a heap more in him than in some that call themselves smart," said Dr. West, unconsciously setting up an irritable defence of the absent one. "Hurry up that horse!"

The foreman vanished. The Doctor put on a pair of leather leggings, large silver spurs, and a broad soft-brimmed hat, but made no other change in his usual half-professional conventional garb. He then went to the window and glanced in the direction of the highway. Now that his son was gone, he felt a faint regret that he had not prolonged the interview. Certain peculiarities in his manner, certain suggestions of expression in his face, speech, and gesture, came back to him now with unsatisfied curiosity. "No matter," he said to himself; "he'll turn up soon again—as soon as I want him, if not sooner. He thinks he's got a mighty soft thing here, and he isn't going to let it go. And there's that same d—d sullen dirty pride of his mother, for all he doesn't cotton to her. Wonder I didn't recognise it at first. And hoarding up that five dollars! That's Jane's brat, all over! And, of course," he added bitterly, "nothing of *me* in him. No! nothing! Well, well, what's the difference?" He turned towards the door with a certain sullen defiance in his face, so like the man he believed he did not resemble that his foreman coming upon him suddenly might have been startled at the likeness. Fortunately, however, Harrison was too much engrossed with the antics of the irrepressible Buckeye, which the ostler had just brought to the door, to notice anything else. The arrival of the horse changed the Doctor's expression to one of more practical and significant resistance. With the assistance of two men at the head of the restive

brute he managed to vault into the saddle. A few wild plunges only seemed to settle him the firmer in his seat —each plunge leaving its record in a thin red line on the animal's flanks, made by the cruel spurs of its rider. Any lingering desire of following his son's footsteps was quickly dissipated by Buckeye, who promptly bolted in the opposite direction, and before Dr. West could gain active control over him they were half-a-mile on their way to La Mision Perdida.

Dr. West did not regret it. Twenty years ago he had voluntarily abandoned a legal union of mutual unfaithfulness and misconduct, and allowed his wife to get the divorce he might have obtained for equal cause. He had abandoned to her the issue of that union—an infant son. Whatever he chose to do now was purely gratuitous; the only hold which this young stranger had on his respect was that *he* also recognised that fact with a cold indifference equal to his own. At present the half-savage brute he bestrode occupied all his attention. Yet he could not help feeling his advancing years tell upon him more heavily that evening; fearless as he was, his strength was no longer equal when measured with the untiring youthful malevolence of his unbroken mustang: for a moment he dwelt regretfully on the lazy, half-developed sinews of his son; for a briefer instant there flashed across him the thought that those sinews ought to replace his own; ought to be *his* to lean upon—that thus, and thus only, could he achieve the old miracle of restoring his lost youth by perpetuating his own power in his own blood, and he, whose profound belief in personality had rejected all hereditary principle, felt this with a sudden exquisite pain. But his horse, perhaps recognising a relaxing grip, took that opportunity to "buck." Curving his back like a cat, and throwing himself into the air with an unexpected bound, he came down with four stiff, inflexible legs, and a shock that might have burst the saddle-girths, had not the wily old man as quickly brought the long rowels of his spurs together,

and fairly locked his heels under Buckeye's collapsing barrel. It was the mustang's last rebellious struggle. The discomfited brute gave in, and darted meekly and apologetically forward, and, as it were, left all its rider's doubts and fears far behind in the vanishing distance.

CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE the subject of Dr. West's meditations was slowly making his way along the high-road towards the fonda. He walked more erect and with less of a shuffle in his gait; but whether this was owing to his having cast the old skin of garments adapted to his slouch, and because he was more securely shod, or whether it was from the sudden straightening of some warped moral quality, it would have been difficult to say. The expression of his face certainly gave no evidence of actual and prospective good fortune; if anything, the lines of discontent around his brow and mouth were more strongly drawn. Apparently, his interview with his father had only the effect of reviving and stirring into greater activity a certain dogged sentiment that, through long years, had become languidly mechanical. He was no longer a beaten animal, but one roused by a chance success into a dangerous knowledge of his power. In his honest workman's dress he was infinitely more to be feared than in his rags; in the lifting of his downcast eye there was the revelation of a baleful intelligence. In his changed condition civilisation only seemed to have armed him against itself.

The fonda, a long low building, with a red-tiled roof extending over a porch or whitewashed verandah, in which drunken vaqueros had been known to occasionally disport their mustangs, did not offer a very reputable appearance to the eye of young Guest as he approached it in the gathering shadows. One or two half-broken horses were

securely fastened to the stout crossbeams of some heavy posts driven in the roadway before it, and a primitive trough of roughly-excavated stone stood near it. Through a broken gate at the side there was a glimpse of a grass-grown and deserted courtyard, piled with the disused packing-cases and barrels of the tienda, or general country shop, which huddled under the same roof at the other end of the building. The opened door of the fonda showed a low studded room fitted up with a rude imitation of an American bar on one side, and containing a few small tables, at which half-a-dozen men were smoking, drinking, and playing cards. The faded pictorial poster of the last bull-fight at Monterey, and an American "Sheriff's notice," were hung on the wall and in the doorway. A thick yellow atmosphere of cigaretto smoke, through which the inmates appeared like brown shadows, pervaded the room.

The young man hesitated before this pestilential interior, and took a seat on a bench on the verandah. After a moment's interval, the yellow landlord came to the door with a look of inquiry, which Guest answered by a demand for lodging and supper. When the landlord had vanished again in the cigaretto fog, the several other guests, one after the other, appeared at the doorway, with their cigarettes in their mouths and their cards still in their hands, and gazed upon him.

There may have been some excuse for their curiosity. As before hinted, Guest's appearance in his overalls and woollen shirt was somewhat incongruous, and, for some inexplicable reason, the same face and figure which did not look inconsistent in rags and extreme poverty now at once suggested a higher social rank both of intellect and refinement than his workman's dress indicated. This, added to his surliness of manner and expression, strengthened a growing suspicion in the mind of the party that he was a fugitive from justice—a forger, a derelict banker, or possibly a murderer. It is only fair to say that the moral sense of

the spectators was not shocked at the suspicion, and that a more active sympathy was only withheld by his reticence. An unfortunate incident seemed to complete the evidence against him. In impatiently responding to the landlord's curt demand for prepayment of his supper, he allowed three or four pieces of gold to escape from his pocket on the verandah. In the quick glances of the party, as he stooped to pick them up, he read the danger of his carelessness.

His sullen self-possession did not seem to be shaken. Calling to the keeper of the tienda, who had appeared at his door in time to witness the Danaë-like shower, he bade him approach, in English.

"What sort of knives have you got?"

"Knives, señor?"

"Yes; bowie-knives or dirks. Knives like that," he said, making an imaginary downward stroke at the table before him.

The shopkeeper entered the tienda, and presently re-appeared with three or four dirks in red leather sheaths. Guest selected the heaviest, and tried its point on the table.

"How much?"

"Tres pesos."

The young man threw him one of his gold pieces, and slipped the knife and its sheath in his boot. When he had received his change from the shopkeeper, he folded his arms and leaned back against the wall in quiet indifference.

The simple act seemed to check aggressive, but not insinuating, interference. In a few moments one of the men appeared at the doorway.

"It is fine weather for the road, little comrade!"

Guest did not reply.

"Ah! the night, it ess splendid," he repeated in broken English, rubbing his hands, as if washing in the air.

Still no reply.

"You shall come from Sank Hosay?"

"I sha'ant."

The stranger muttered something in Spanish, but the landlord, who reappeared to place Guest's supper on a table on the verandah, here felt the obligation of interfering to protect a customer apparently so aggressive and so opulent. He pushed the inquisitor aside with a few hasty words, and, after Guest had finished his meal, offered to show him his room. It was a dark vaulted closet on the ground-floor, gaining light from the stable-yard through a barred iron grating. At the first glimpse it looked like a prison cell; looking more deliberately at the black tresselled bed, and the votive images hanging on the wall, it might have been a tomb.

"It is the best," said the landlord. "The Padre Vincento will have none other on his journey."

"I suppose God protects him," said Guest; "that door don't." He pointed to the worm-eaten door, without bolt or fastening.

"Ah, what matter? Are we not all friends?"

"Certainly," responded Guest, with his surliest manner, as he returned to the verandah. Nevertheless, he resolved not to occupy the cell of the reverend Padre; not from any personal fear of his disreputable neighbours, though he was fully alive to their peculiarities, but from the nomadic instinct which was still strong in his blood. He felt he could not yet bear the confinement of a close room or the propinquity of his fellow-man. He would rest on the verandah until the moon was fairly up, and then he would again take to the road.

He was half reclining on the bench, with the slowly closing and opening lids of some tired but watchful animal, when the sound of wheels, voices, and clatter of hoofs on the highway arrested his attention, and he sat upright. The moon was slowly lifting itself over the limitless stretch of grain-fields before him on the other side of the road, and dazzling him with its level lustre. He could barely

discern a cavalcade of dark figures and a large vehicle rapidly approaching, before it drew up tumultuously in front of the fonda. It was a pleasure-party of ladies and gentlemen on horseback and in a four-horsed char-à-bancs returning to La Mision Perdida. Buchanan, Raymond, and Garnier were there; Amita and Dorotea in the body of the char-à-bancs, and Maruja seated on the box. Much to his own astonishment and that of some others of the party, Captain Carroll was among the riders. Only Maruja and her mother knew that he was recalled to refute a repetition of the gossip already circulated regarding his sudden withdrawal; only Maruja alone knew the subtle words which made that recall so potent yet so hopeless.

Maruja's quick eyes, observant of everything, even under the double fire of Captain Carroll and Garnier, instantly caught those of the erect figure on the bench in the verandah. Surely that was the face of the tramp she had spoken to! and yet there was a change, not only in the dress but in the general resemblance. After the first glance, Guest withdrew his eyes and gazed at the other figures in the char-à-bancs without moving a muscle.

Maruja's whims and caprices were many and original, and when, after a sudden little cry and a declaration that she could stand her cramped position no longer, she leaped from the box into the road, no one was surprised. Garnier and Captain Carroll quickly followed.

"I should like to look into the fonda while the horses are being watered," she said laughingly, "just to see what it is that attracts Pereo there so often." Before any one could restrain this new caprice, she was already upon the verandah.

To reach the open door, she had to pass so near Guest that her soft white flounces brushed his knees, and the flowers in her girdle left their perfume in his face. But he neither moved nor raised his eyes. When she had passed, he rose quietly and stepped into the road.

On her nearer survey, Maruja was convinced it was the same man. She remained for an instant with a little hand on the doorpost. "What a horrid place, and what dreadful people!" she said in audible English as she glanced quickly after Guest. "Really, Pereo ought to be warned against keeping such company. Come, let us go."

She contrived to pass Guest again in regaining the carriage; but in the few moments' further delay he walked on down the road before them, and by the time they were ready to start he was slowly sauntering some hundred yards ahead. They passed him at a rapid trot, but the next moment the char-à-bancs was suddenly pulled up.

"My fan!" cried Maruja. "Blessed Santa Maria!—my fan!"

A small black object, seen distinctly in the moonlight, was lying on the road, directly in the track of the sauntering stranger. Garnier attempted to alight; Carroll reined in his horse.

"Stop, all of you!" said Maruja; "that man will bring it to me."

It seemed as if he would. He stopped and picked it up, and approached the carriage. Maruja stood up in her seat with her veil thrown back, her graceful hand extended, her eyes and mouth tremulous with an irresistible smile. The stranger came nearer, singled out Captain Carroll, tossed the fan to him with a slight nod, and passed on the other side.

"One moment," said Maruja, almost harshly, to the driver. "One moment," she continued, drawing her purse from her pocket brusquely. "Let me reward this civil gentleman of the road! Here, sir;" but, before she could continue, Carroll wheeled to her side, and interposed. "Pray, collect yourself, Miss Saltonstall," he said hurriedly; "you cannot tell who this man may be. He does not seem to be one who would insult you, or whom *you* would insult gratuitously."

"Give me the fan, Captain Carroll," she said, with a soft and caressing smile. "Thank you." She took it, and, breaking it through the middle between her gloved hands, tossed it into the highway. "You are right—it smells of the fonda—and the road. Thank you, again. You are so thoughtful for me, Captain Carroll," she murmured, raising her eyes gently to his, and then suddenly withdrawing them with a half-sigh. "But I am keeping you all. Go on."

The carriage rolled away, and Guest returned from the hedge to the middle of the road. San José lay in the opposite direction from the disappearing cavalcade; but on leaving the fonda he had determined to lead his inquisitors astray by doubling and making a circuit of the hostelry through the fields hidden in the tall grain. This he did, securely passing them within sound of their voices, and was soon well on his way again. He avoided the highway, and striking a trail through the meadows, diverged to the right, where the low towers and brown walls of a ruined mission church rose above the plain. This would enable him to escape any direct pursuit on the high-road, besides, from its slight elevation, giving him a more extended view of the plain. As he neared it, he was surprised to see that, although it was partly dismantled, and the roof had fallen in the central aisle, a part of it was still used as a chapel, and a light was burning behind a narrow opening, partly window and partly shrine. He was almost upon it, when the figure of a man who had been kneeling beneath, with his back towards him, rose, crossed himself devoutly, and stood upright. Before he could turn, Guest disappeared round the angle of the wall, and the tall, erect figure of the solitary worshipper passed on without heeding him.

But if Guest had been successful in evading the observation of the man he had come so suddenly upon, he was utterly unconscious of another figure that had been tracking *him* for the last ten minutes through the tall grain, and had even succeeded in gaining the shadow of the wall

behind him; and it was this figure, and not his own, that eventually attracted the attention of the tall stranger. The pursuing figure was rapidly approaching the unconscious Guest; in another moment it would have been upon him, when it was suddenly seized from behind by the tall devotee. There was a momentary struggle, and then it freed itself, with the exclamation, "Pereo!"

"Yes—Pereo!" said the old man, panting from his exertions. "And thou art Miguel. So thou wouldst murder a man for a few pesos!" he said, pointing to the knife which the desperado had hurriedly hid in his jacket, "and callest thyself a Californian!"

"'Tis only an Americano—a runaway, with some ill-gotten gold," said Miguel sullenly, yet with unmistakable fear of the old man. "Besides, it was only to frighten him, the braggart. But since thou fearest to touch a hair of those interlopers"——

"Fearest!" said Pereo fiercely, clutching him by the throat, and forcing him against the wall. "Fearest! sayest thou? I, Pereo, fear? Dost thou think I would soil these hands, that might strike a higher quarry, with blood of thy game?"

"Forgive me, padrono," gasped Miguel, now thoroughly alarmed at the old man's awakened passion; "pardon; I meant that, since thou knowest him"——

"I know him?" repeated Pereo scornfully, contemptuously throwing Miguel aside, who at once took that opportunity to increase his distance from the old man's arm. "I know him? Thou shalt see. Come hither, child," he called, beckoning to Guest. "Come hither; thou hast nothing to fear now."

Guest, who had been attracted by the sound of altercation behind him, but who was utterly unconscious of its origin or his own relation to it, came forward impatiently. As he did so, Miguel took to his heels. The act did not tend to mollify Guest's surly suspicions, and pausing a few

feet from the old man, he roughly demanded his business with him.

Pereo raised his head with the dignity of years and habits of command. The face of the young man confronting him was clearly illuminated by the moonlight. Pereo's eyes suddenly dilated, his mouth stiffened, he staggered back against the wall.

"Who are you?" he gasped, in uncertain English.

Believing himself the subject of some drunkard's pastime, Guest replied savagely, "One who has enough of this d—d nonsense, and will stand no more of it from any one, young or old," and turned abruptly on his heel.

"Stay, one moment, señor, for the love of God!"

Some keen accent of agony in the old man's voice touched even Guest's selfish nature. He halted.

"You are—a stranger here?" faltered Pereo. "Yes?"

"I am."

"You do not live here?—you have no friends?"

"I told you I am a stranger. I never was here before in my life," said Guest impatiently.

"True; I am a fool," said the old man hurriedly to himself. "I am mad—mad! It is not *his* voice. No! It is not *his* look, now that his face changes. I am crazy." He stopped, and passed his trembling hands across his eyes. "Pardon, señor," he continued, recalling himself with a humility that was almost ironical in its extravagance. "Pardon, pardon! Yet, perhaps, it is not too much to have wanted to know who was the man one has saved."

"Saved!" repeated Guest, with incredulous contempt.

"Ay!" said Pereo haughtily, drawing his figure erect; "ay, saved! señor." He stopped and shrugged his shoulders. "But let it pass—I say—let it pass. Take an old man's advice, friend; show not your gold hereafter to strangers lightly, no matter how lightly you have come by it. Good night!"

Guest for a moment hesitated whether to resent the old

man's speech, or to let it pass as the incoherent fancy of a brain maddened by drink. Then he ended the discussion by turning his back abruptly, and continuing his way to the high-road.

"So!" said Pereo, looking after him with abstracted eyes, "so! it was only a fancy. And yet—even now, as he turned away, I saw the same cold insolence in his eye. Caramba! Am I mad—mad—that I must keep for ever before my eyes, night and day, the image of that dog in every outcast, every ruffian, every wayside bully that I meet? No, no, good Pereo! Softly! this is mere madness, good Pereo," he murmured to himself; "thou wilt have none of it; none, good Pereo. Come, come!" He let his head fall slowly forward on his breast, and in that action, seeming to take up again the burden of a score more years upon his shoulders, he moved slowly away.

When he entered the fonda half-an-hour later, the awe in which he was held by the half-superstitious ruffians appeared to have increased. Whatever story the fugitive Miguel had told his companions regarding Pereo's protection of the young stranger, it was certain that it had its full effect. Obsequious to the last degree, the landlord was so profoundly touched, when Pereo, not displeased with this evidence of his power over his countrymen, condescendingly offered to click glasses with him, that he endeavoured to placate him still further.

"It is a pity your worship was not here earlier," he began, with a significant glance at the others, "to have seen a gallant young stranger that was here. A spice of wickedness about him, truly—a kind of Don Cæsar—but bearing himself like a very caballero always. It would have pleased your worship, who likes not those canting Puritans, such as our neighbour yonder."

"Ah!" said Pereo reflectively, warming under the potent fires of flattery and aguardiente, "possibly I *have* seen him. He was like"——

"Like none of the dogs thou hast seen about San Antonio," interrupted the landlord. "Scarcely did he seem Americano, though he spoke no Spanish."

The old man chuckled to himself viciously. "And thou, thou old fool, Pereo, must needs see a likeness to thine enemy in this poor runaway child—this fugitive Don Juan! He! he!" Nevertheless, he still felt a vague terror of the condition of mind which had produced this fancy, and drank so deeply to dispel his nervousness that it was with difficulty he could mount his horse again. The exaltation of liquor, however, appeared only to intensify his characteristics; his face became more lugubrious and melancholy, his manner more ceremonious and dignified; and, erect and stiff in his saddle from the waist upwards, but leaning from side to side with the motion of his horse, like the tall mast of some labouring sloop, he "loped" away towards the House of the Lost Mission. Once or twice he broke into sentimental song. Strangely enough, his ditty was a popular Spanish refrain of some matador's aristocratic inamorata :—

> "Do you see my black eyes?
> I am Mañuel's Duchess,"

sang Pereo, with infinite gravity. His horse's hoofs seemed to keep time with the refrain, and he occasionally waved in the air the long leather thong of his bridle-rein.

It was quite late when he reached La Mision Perdida. Turning into the little lane that led to the stable-yard, he dismounted at a gate in the hedge which led to the summer-house of the old Mision garden, and, throwing his reins on his mustang's neck, let the animal precede him to the stables. The moon shone full on the enclosure as he emerged from the labyrinth. With uncovered head he approached the Indian mound, and sank on his knees before it.

The next moment he rose with an exclamation of terror, and his hat dropped from his trembling hand. Directly

before him, a small, grey, wolfish-looking animal had stopped half-way down the mound on encountering his motionless figure. Frightened by his outcry, and unable to retreat, the shadowy depredator had fallen back on his slinking haunches with a snarl, and bared teeth that glittered in the moonlight.

In an instant the expression of terror on the old man's ashen face turned into a fixed look of insane exaltation. His white lips moved; he advanced a step further, and held out both hands towards the crouching animal.

"So! It is thou—at last! And comest thou here thy tardy Pereo to chide? Comest *thou*, too, to tell the poor old man his heart is cold, his limbs are feeble, his brain weak and dizzy?—that he is no longer fit to do thy master's work? Ay, gnash thy teeth at him! Curse him!—curse him in thy throat! But listen!—listen, good friend—I will tell thee a secret—ay, good grey friar, a secret—such a secret! A plan, all mine—fresh from this old grey head; ha! ha!—all mine! To be wrought by these poor old arms; ha! ha! All mine! Listen!"

He stealthily made a step nearer the affrighted animal. With a sudden sidelong snap, it swiftly bounded by his side, and vanished in the thicket; and Pereo, turning wildly, with a moan sank down helplessly on the grave of his forefathers.

CHAPTER VI.

To the open chagrin of most of the gentlemen and the unexpected relief of some of her own sex, Maruja, after an evening of more than usual caprice and wilfulness, retired early to her chamber. Here she beguiled Enriquita, a younger sister, to share her solitude for an hour, and with a new and charming melancholy presented her with mature counsel and some younger trinkets and adornments.

"Thou wilt find them but folly, 'Riquita; but thou art young, and wilt outgrow them as I have. I am sick of the Indian beads, everybody wears them; but they seem to suit thy complexion. Thou art not yet quite old enough for jewellery; but take thy choice of these." "'Ruja," replied Enriquita eagerly, "surely thou wilt not give up this necklace of carved amber, that was brought thee from Manilla?—it becomes thee so! Everybody says it. All the caballeros, Raymond and Victor, swear that it sets off thy beauty like nothing else." "When thou knowest men better," responded Maruja in a deep voice, "thou wilt care less for what they say, and despise what they do. Besides, I wore it to-day—and—I hate it." "But what fan wilt thou keep thyself? The one of sandal-wood thou hadst to-day?" continued Enriquita, timidly eyeing the pretty things upon the table. "None," responded Maruja didactically, "but the simplest, which I shall buy myself. Truly, it is time to set one's self against this extravagance. Girls think nothing of spending as much upon a fan as would buy a horse and saddle for a poor man." "But why so serious to-night, my sister?" said the little Enriquita, her eyes filling with ready tears. "It grieves me," responded Maruja promptly, "to find thee, like the rest, giving thy soul up to the mere glitter of the world. However, go, child, take the beads, but leave the amber; it would make thee yellower than thou art, which the blessed Virgin forbid! Good-night."

She kissed her affectionately, and pushed her from the room. Nevertheless, after a moment's survey of her lonely chamber, she hastily slipped on a pale satin dressing-gown, and, darting across the passage, dashed into the bedroom of the youngest Miss Wilson, haled that sentimental brunette from her night toilette, dragged her into her own chamber, and, enwrapping her in a huge mantle of silk and grey fur, fed her with chocolates and chestnuts, and, reclining on her sympathetic shoulder, continued her

arraignment of the world and its follies until nearly daybreak.

It was past noon when Maruja awoke, to find Faquita standing by her bedside with ill-concealed impatience.

"I ventured to awaken the Doña Maruja," she said, with vivacious alacrity, "for news—terrible news! The American, Dr. West, is found dead this morning in the San José road!"

"Dr. West dead!" repeated Maruja thoughtfully, but without emotion.

"Surely dead—very dead. He was thrown from his horse and dragged by the stirrups—how far, the blessed Virgin only knows. But he is found dead—this Dr. West—his foot in the broken stirrup, his hand holding a piece of the bridle! I thought I would waken the Doña Maruja, that no one else should break it to the Doña Maria."

"That no one else should break it to my mother?" repeated Maruja coldly. "What mean you, girl?"

"I mean that no stranger should tell her," stammered Faquita, lowering her bold eyes.

"You mean," said Maruja slowly, "that no silly, staring, tongue-wagging gossip should dare to break upon the morning devotions of the lady mother with open-mouthed tales of horror! You are wise, Faquita! I will tell her myself. Help me to dress."

But the news had already touched the outer shell of the great house, and little groups of the visitors were discussing it upon the verandah. For once the idle badinage of a pleasure-seeking existence was suspended; stupid people with facts came to the fore; practical people with inquiring minds became interesting; servants were confidentially appealed to; the local express man became a hero, and it was even noticed that he was intelligent and good-looking.

"What makes it more distressing," said Raymond, joining one of the groups, "is, that it appears the Doctor visited Mrs. Saltonstall last evening, and left the casa at

eleven. Sanchez, who was perhaps the last person who saw him alive, says that he noticed his horse was very violent, and the Doctor did not seem able to control him. The accident probably happened half an hour later, as he was picked up about three miles from here, and from appearances must have been dragged with his foot in the stirrup fully half a mile before the girth broke and freed the saddle and stirrup together. The mustang, with nothing on but his broken bridle, was found grazing at the rancho as early as four o'clock, an hour before the body of his master was discovered by the men sent from the rancho to look for him."

"Eh, but the man must have been clean daft to have trusted himself to one of those savage beasts of the country," said Mr. Buchanan. "And he was no so young either—about sixty, I should say. It didna look even respectable, I remember, when we met him the other day, careering over the country for all the world like one of those crazy Mexicans. And yet he seemed steady and sensible enough when he didna let his schemes of 'improvements' run away with him like yon furious beastie. Eh well, puir man—it was a sudden ending! And his family—eh?"

"I don't think he has one—at least here," said Raymond. "You can't always tell in California. I believe he was a widower."

"Ay, man, but the heirs; there must be considerable property?" said Buchanan impatiently.

"Oh, the heirs. If he's made no will, which doesn't look like so prudent and practical a man as he was—the heirs will probably crop up some day."

"*Probably!* crop up some day," repeated Buchanan aghast.

"Yes. You must remember that *we* don't take heirs quite as much into account as you do in the old country. The loss of the *man* and how to replace *him*, is much more to us than the disposal of his property. Now,

Doctor West was a power far beyond his actual possessions —and we will know very soon how much those were dependent upon him."

"What do you mean?" asked Buchanan anxiously.

"I mean that five minutes after the news of the Doctor's death was confirmed, your friend Mr. Stanton sent a messenger with a dispatch to the nearest telegraphic office, and that he himself drove over to catch Aladdin before the news could reach him."

Buchanan looked uneasy; so did one or two of the native Californians who composed the group, and who had been listening attentively. "And where is this same telegraphic office?" asked Buchanan cautiously.

"I'll drive you over there presently," responded Raymond grimly. "There'll be nothing doing here to-day. As Dr. West was a near neighbour of the family, his death suspends our pleasure-seeking until after the funeral."

Mr. Buchanan moved away. Captain Carroll and Garnier drew nearer the speaker. "I trust it will not withdraw from us the society of Miss Saltonstall," said Garnier lightly; "at least, that she will not be inconsolable."

"She did not seem to be particularly sympathetic with Dr. West the other day," said Captain Carroll, colouring slightly with the recollection of the morning in the summer-house, yet willing, in his hopeless passion, even to share that recollection with his rival. "Did you not think so, Monsieur Garnier?"

"Very possibly; and as Miss Saltonstall is quite artless and childlike in the expression of her likes and dislikes," said Raymond, with the faintest touch of irony, "you can judge as well as I can."

Garnier parried the thrust lightly. "You are no kinder to our follies than you are to the grand passions of these gentlemen. Confess, you frightened them horribly. You are—what is called—a bear—eh? You depreciate in the interests of business."

Raymond did not at first appear to notice the sarcasm. "I only stated," he said gravely, "that which these gentlemen will find out for themselves before they are many hours older. Dr. West was the brain of the county, as Aladdin is its life-blood. It only remains to be seen how far the loss of that brain affects the county. The Stock Exchange market in San Francisco will indicate that to-day in the shares of the San Antonio and Soquel Railroad, and the West Mills and Manufacturing Co. It is a matter that may affect even our friends here. Whatever West's social standing was in this house, lately he was in confidential business relations with Mrs. Saltonstall." He raised his eyes for the first time to Garnier as he added slowly, "It is to be hoped that if our hostess has no social reasons to deplore the loss of Dr. West, she at least will have no other."

With a lover's instinct, conscious only of some annoyance to Maruja in all this, Carroll anxiously looked for her appearance among the others. He was doomed to disappointment, however. His half-timid inquiries only resulted in the information that Maruja was closeted with her mother. The penetralia of the casa was only accessible to the family; yet, as he wandered uneasily about, he could not help passing once or twice before the quaint low archway with its grated door that opened from the central hall. His surprise may be imagined when he suddenly heard his name uttered in a low voice; and, looking up, he beheld the soft eyes of Maruja at the grating.

She held the door partly open with one little hand, and made a sign for him to enter with the other. When he had done so, she said, "Come with me," and preceded him down the dim corridor. His heart beat thickly; the incense of this sacred inner life, with its faint suggestion of dead rose-leaves, filled him with a voluptuous languor; his breath was lost, as if a soft kiss had taken it away; his senses swam in the light mist that seemed to suffuse every-

thing. His step trembled as she suddenly turned aside, and, opening a door, ushered him into a small vaulted chamber.

In the first glance it seemed to be an oratory or chapel. A large gold and ebony crucifix hung on the wall. There was a *prie-dieu* of heavy dark mahogany in the centre of the tiled floor; there was a low ottoman or couch, covered with a mantle of dark violet velvet, like a pall; there were two quaintly-carved stiff chairs; a religious, almost ascetic air pervaded the apartment; but no dreamy Eastern seraglio could have affected him with an intoxication so profoundly and mysteriously sensuous.

Maruja pointed to a chair, and then, with a peculiarly feminine movement, placed herself sideways upon the ottoman, half reclining on her elbow on a high cushion, her deep, billowy flounces partly veiling the funereal velvet below. Her oval face was pale and melancholy, her eyes moist as if with recent tears; an expression as of troubled passion lurked in their depths and in the corners of her mouth. Scarcely knowing why, Carroll fancied that thus she might appear if she were in love, and the daring thought made him tremble.

"I wanted to speak with you alone," she said gently, as if in explanation; "but don't look at me so. I have had a bad night, and now this calamity"—— She stopped and then added softly, "I want you to do a favour for—my mother."

Captain Carroll with an effort at last found his voice. "But *you* are in trouble, *you* are suffering. I had no idea this unfortunate affair came so near to you."

"Nor did I," said Maruja, closing her fan with a slight snaq. "I knew nothing of it until my mother told me this morning. To be frank with you, it now appears that Dr. West was her most intimate business adviser. All her affairs were in his hands. I cannot explain how, or why, or when; but it is so."

"And is that all?" said Carroll, with boyish openness of relief. "And you have no other sorrow?"

In spite of herself, a tender smile, such as she might have bestowed on an impulsive boy, broke on her lips. "And is that not enough? What would you? No—sit where you are! We are here to talk seriously. And you do not ask what is this favour my mother wishes?"

"No matter what it is, it shall be done," said Carroll quickly. "I am your mother's slave if she will but let me serve at your side. Only," he paused, "I wish it was not business—I know nothing of business."

"If it were only business, Captain Carroll," said Maruja slowly, "I would have spoken to Raymond or the Señor Buchanan; if it were only confidence, Pereo, our mayordomo, would have dragged himself from his sick-bed this morning to do my mother's bidding. But it is more than that—it is the functions of a gentleman—and my mother, Captain Carroll, would like to say of—a friend."

He seized her hand and covered it with kisses. She withdrew it gently.

"What have I to do?" he asked eagerly.

She drew a note from her belt. "It is very simple. You must ride over to Aladdin with that note. You must give it to him *alone*—more than that, you must not let any one who may be there think you are making any but a social call. If he keeps you to dine—you must stay—you will bring back anything he may give you and deliver it to me secretly for her."

"Is that all?" asked Carroll, with a slight touch of disappointment in his tone.

"No," said Maruja, rising impulsively. "No, Captain Carroll—it is *not* all! And you shall know all, if only to prove to you how we confide in you—and to leave you free, after you have heard it, to do as you please." She stood before him, quite white, opening and shutting her fan quickly, and tapping the tiled floor with her little foot.

"I have told you Dr. West was my mother's business adviser. She looked upon him as more—as a friend. Do you know what a dangerous thing it is for a woman who has lost one protector to begin to rely upon another? Well, my mother is not yet old. Dr. West appreciated her—Dr. West did not depreciate himself—two things that go far with a woman, Captain Carroll, and my mother is a woman." She paused, and then, with a light toss of her fan, said, "Well, to make an end, but for this excellent horse and this too ambitious rider, one knows not how far the old story of my mother's first choice would have been repeated, and the curse of Koorotora again fallen on the land."

"And you tell me this—you, Maruja—you who warned me against my hopeless passion for you?"

"Could I foresee this?" she said passionately; "and are you mad enough not to see that this very act would have made *your* suit intolerable to my relations?"

"Then you did think of my suit, Maruja?" he said, grasping her hand.

"Or any one's suit," she continued hurriedly, turning away with a slight increase of colour in her cheeks. After a moment's pause she added, in a gentler and half-reproachful voice, "Do you think I have confided my mother's story to you for this purpose only? Is this the help you proffer?"

"Forgive me, Maruja," said the young officer earnestly. "I am selfish, I know—for I love you. But you have not told me yet how I could help your mother by delivering this letter, which any one could do."

"Let me finish, then," said Maruja. "It is for you to judge what may be done. Letters have passed between my mother and Dr. West. My mother is imprudent; I know not what she may have written or what she might not write in confidence. But you understand, they are not letters to be made public nor to pass into any hands but

hers. They are not to be left to be bandied about by his American friends; to be commented upon by strangers; to reach the ears of the Guitierrez. They belong to that grave which lies between the Past and my mother; they must not rise from it to haunt her."

"I understand," said the young officer quietly. "This letter, then, is my authority to recover them?"

"Partly, though it refers to other matters. This Mr. Prince, whom you Americans call Aladdin, was a friend of Dr. West; they were associated in business, and he will probably have access to his papers. The rest we must leave to you."

"I think you may," said Carroll simply.

Maruja stretched out her hand. The young man bent over it respectfully and moved towards the door.

She had expected him to make some protestation—perhaps even to claim some reward. But the instinct which made him forbear even in thought to take advantage of the duty laid upon him, which dominated even his miserable passion for her, and made it subservient to his exaltation of honour; this epaulette of the officer, and blood of the gentleman, this simple possession of knighthood not laid on by perfunctory steel, but springing from within—all this, I grieve to say, was partly unintelligible to Maruja, and not entirely satisfactory. Since he had entered the room they seemed to have changed their situations; he was no longer the pleading lover that trembled at her feet. For one base moment she thought it was the result of his knowledge of her mother's weakness; but the next instant, meeting his clear glance, she coloured with shame. Yet she detained him vaguely a moment before the grated door in the secure shadow of the arch. He might have kissed her there! He did not.

In the gloomy stagnation of the great house, it was natural that he should escape from it for a while, and the saddling of his horse for a solitary ride attracted no

attention. But it might have been noticed that his manner had lost much of that nervous susceptibility and anxiety which indicates a lover; and it was with a return of his professional coolness and precision that he rode out of the patio as if on parade. Erect, observant, and self-possessed, he felt himself "on duty," and, putting spurs to his horse, cantered along the highroad, finding an inexpressible relief in motion. He was doing something in the interest of helplessness and of *her*. He had no doubt of his right to interfere. He did not bother himself with the rights of others. Like all self-contained men, he had no plan of action, except what the occasion might suggest.

He was more than two miles from La Mision Perdida, when his quick eye was attracted by a saddle-blanket lying in the roadside ditch. A recollection of the calamity of the previous night made him rein in his horse and examine it. It was without doubt the saddle-blanket of Dr. West's horse, lost when the saddle came off, after the Doctor's body had been dragged by the runaway beast. But a second fact forced itself equally upon the young officer. It was lying nearly a mile from the spot where the body had been picked up. This certainly did not agree with the accepted theory that the accident had taken place further on, and that the body had been dragged until the saddle came off where it was found. His professional knowledge of equitation and the technique of accoutrements exploded the idea that the saddle could have slipped here, the saddle-blanket fallen, and the horse have run nearly a mile hampered by the saddle hanging under him. Consequently, the saddle, blanket, and unfortunate rider must have been precipitated together, and at the same moment, on or near this very spot. Captain Carroll was not a detective; he had no theory to establish, no motive to discover, only, as an officer, he would have simply rejected any excuse offered on those terms by one of his troopers to account for a similar accident. He

troubled himself with no further deduction. Without dismounting, he gave a closer attention to the marks of struggling hoofs near the edge of the ditch, which had not yet been obliterated by the daily travel. In doing so, his horse's hoof struck a small object partly hidden in the thick dust of the highway. It seemed to be a leather letter or memorandum case adapted for the breast pocket. Carroll instantly dismounted and picked it up. The name and address of Dr. West were legibly written on the inside. It contained a few papers and notes, but nothing more. The possibility that it might disclose the letters he was seeking was a hope quickly past. It was only a corroborative fact that the accident had taken place on the spot where he was standing. He was losing time; he hurriedly put the book in his pocket, and once more spurred forward on his road.

CHAPTER VII.

The exterior of Aladdin's Palace, familiar as it already was to Carroll, struck him that afternoon as looking more than usually unreal, ephemeral, and unsubstantial. The Moorish arches, of the thinnest white pine, the arabesque screens and lattices that looked as if made of pierced cardboard, the golden minarets that seemed to be glued to the shell-like towers, and the hollow batttlements that visibly warped and cracked in the fierce sunlight—all appeared more than ever like a theatrical scene that might sink through the ground or vanish on either side to the sound of the prompter's whistle. Recalling Raymond's cynical insinuations, he could not help fancying that the house had been built by a conscientious genie with a view to the possibility of the lamp and the ring passing, with other effects, into the hands of the sheriff.

Nevertheless, the servant who took Captain Carroll's

horse summoned another domestic, who preceded him into a small waiting-room off the gorgeous central hall, which looked not unlike the private bar-room of a first-class hotel, and presented him with a sherry cobbler. It was a peculiarity of Aladdin's Palace that the host seldom did the honours of his own house, but usually deputed the task to some friend, and generally the last new-comer. Carroll was consequently not surprised when he was presently joined by an utter stranger, who again pressed upon him the refreshment he had just declined. "You see," said the transitory host, "I'm a stranger myself here, and haven't got the ways of the regular customers; but call for anything you like, and I'll see it got for you. Jim" (the actual Christian name of Aladdin) "is headin' a party through the stables. Would you like to join 'em—they ain't more than half through now—or will you come right to the billiard-room—the latest thing out in stained glass and iron—ez pretty as fresh paint? or will you meander along to the bridal suite, and see the bamboo and silver dressing-room, and the white satin and crystal bed that cost fifteen thousand dollars as it stands? Or," he added confidentially, "would you like to cut the whole cussed thing, and I'll get out Jim's 2.32 trotter and his spider-legged buggy, and we'll take a spin over to the Springs afore dinner?" It was, however, more convenient to Carroll's purpose to conceal his familiarity with the Aladdin treasures, and to politely offer to follow his guide through the house. "I reckon Jim's pretty busy now," continued the stranger; "what with old Doc West going under so suddent, just ez he'd got things boomin' with that railroad and his manufactory company. The stocks went down to nothing this morning; and 'twixt you and me, the boys say," he added, mysteriously sinking his voice, "it was jest the tightest squeeze there whether there wouldn't be a general burst up all round. But Jim was over at San Antonio afore the Doctor's body was laid out, just ran that telegraph himself for about two

hours; had a meeting of trustees and directors afore the Coroner came; had the Doctor's books and papers brought over here in a buggy, and another meeting before luncheon. Why, by the time the other fellows began to drop in to know if the Doctor was really dead, Jim Prince had discounted the whole affair two years ahead. Why, bless you, nearly everybody is in it. That Spanish woman over there, with the pretty daughter—that high-toned Greaser with the big house—you know who I mean"——

"I don't think I do," said Carroll coldly. "I know a lady named Saltonstall, with several daughters."

"That's her; thought I'd seen you there once. Well, the Doctor's got her into it, up to the eyes. I reckon she's mortgaged everything to him."

It required all Carroll's trained self-possession to prevent his garrulous guide from reading his emotion in his face. This, then, was the secret of Maruja's melancholy. Poor child! how bravely she had borne up under it; and *he*, in his utter selfishness, had never suspected it. Perhaps that letter was her delicate way of breaking the news to him, for he should certainly now hear it all from Aladdin's lips. And this man, who evidently had succeeded to the control of Dr. West's property, doubtless had possession of the letters too! Humph! He shut his lips firmly together, and strode along by the side of his innocent guide, erect and defiant.

He did not have long to wait. The sound of voices, the opening of doors, and the trampling of feet indicated that the other party were being "shown over" that part of the building Carroll and his companion were approaching. "There's Jim and his gang now," said his cicerone; "I'll tell him you're here, and step out of this show business myself. So long! I reckon I'll see you at dinner." At this moment Prince and a number of ladies and gentlemen appeared at the further end of the hall; his late guide joined them, and apparently indicated Carroll's presence,

as, with a certain lounging, off-duty, officer-like way the young man sauntered on.

Aladdin, like others of his class, objected to the military, theoretically and practically; but he was not above recognising their social importance in a country of no society, and of even being fascinated by Carroll's quiet and secure self-possession and self-contentment in a community of restless ambition and aggressive assertion. He came forward to welcome him cordially; he introduced him with an air of satisfaction; he would have preferred if he had been in uniform, but he contented himself with the fact that Carroll, like all men of disciplined limbs, carried himself equally well in mufti.

"You have shown us everything," said Carroll, smiling, "except the secret chamber where you keep the magic lamp and ring. Are we not to see the spot where the incantation that produces these marvels is held, even if we are forbidden to witness the ceremony? The ladies are dying to see your sanctum—your study—your workshop—where you really live."

"You'll find it a mere den, as plain as my bedroom," said Prince, who prided himself on the Spartan simplicity of his own habits, and was not averse to the exhibition. "Come this way." He crossed the hall, and entered a small, plainly-furnished room, containing a table piled with papers, some of which were dusty and worn-looking. Carroll instantly conceived the idea that these were Dr. West's property. He took his letter quietly from his pocket; and when the attention of the others was diverted laid it on the table, with the remark, in an undertone, audible only to Prince, "From Mrs. Saltonstall."

Aladdin had that sublime audacity which so often fills the place of tact. Casting a rapid glance at Carroll, he cried, "Hallo!" and wheeling suddenly round on his following guests, with a bewildering extravagance of playful brusqueness, actually bundled them from the room. "The

incantation is on!" he cried, waving his arms in the air; "the genie is at work. No admittance except on business! Follow Miss Wilson," he added, clapping both hands on the shoulders of the prettiest and shyest young lady of the party, with an irresistible paternal familiarity. "She's your hostess. I'll honour her drafts to any amount;" and before they were aware of his purpose, or that Carroll was no longer among them, Aladdin had closed the door, that shut with a spring lock, and was alone with the young man. He walked quickly to his desk, took up the letter, and opened it.

His face of dominant, self-satisfied good-humour became set and stern. Without taking the least notice of Carroll, he rose, and stepping to a telegraphic instrument at a side table, manipulated half a dozen ivory knobs with a sudden energy. Then he returned to the table, and began hurriedly to glance over the memoranda and indorsements of the files of papers piled upon it. Carroll's quick eye caught sight of a small packet of letters in a writing of unmistakable feminine delicacy, and made certain they were the ones he was in quest of. Without raising his eye, Mr. Prince asked, almost rudely—

"Who else has she told this to?"

"If you refer to the contents of that letter, it was written and handed to me about three hours ago. It has not been out of my possession since then."

"Humph! Who's at the casa? There's Buchanan, and Raymond, and Victor Guitierrez, eh?"

"I think I can say almost positively that Mrs. Saltonstall has seen no one but her daughter since the news reached her, if that is what you wish to know," said Carroll, still following the particular package of letters with his eyes, as Mr. Prince continued his examination. Prince stopped.

"Are you sure?"

"Almost sure."

Prince rose, this time with a greater ease of manner, and,

going to the table, ran his fingers over the knobs, as if mechanically. "One would like to know at once all there is to know about a transaction that changes the front of four millions of capital in about four hours, eh, captain?" he said, for the first time really regarding his guest. "Just four hours ago, in this very room, we found out that the widow Saltonstall owed Dr. West about a million, tied up in investments, and we calculated to pull her through with perhaps the loss of half. If she's got this assignment of the Doctor's property that she speaks of in her letter, as collateral security, and it's all regular, and she—so to speak—steps into Dr. West's place, by G—d, sir, we owe *him* about three millions, and we've got to settle with *her*—and that's all about it. You've dropped a little bombshell in here, captain, and the splinters are flying round as far as San Francisco now. I confess it beats me regularly. I always thought the old man was a little keen over there at the casa—but she was a woman, and he was a man for all his sixty years, and *that* combination I never thought of. I only wonder she hadn't gobbled him up before."

Captain Carroll's face betrayed no trace of the bewilderment and satisfaction at this news of which he had been the unconscious bearer, nor of resentment at the coarseness of its translation.

"There does not seem to be any memorandum of this assignment," continued Prince, turning over the papers.

"Have you looked there?" said Carrol, taking up the packet of letters.

"No—they seem to me some private letters she refers to in this letter, and that she wants back again."

"Let us see," said Carroll, untying the packet. There were three or four closely-written notes in Spanish and English.

"Love-letters, I reckon," said Prince—"that's why the old girl wants 'em back. She don't care to have the wheedling that fetched the Doctor trotted out to the public."

"Let us look more carefully," said Carroll pleasantly, opening each letter before Prince, yet so skilfully as to frustrate any attempt of the latter to read them. "There does not seem to be any memorandum here. They are evidently only private letters."

"Quite so," said Prince.

Captain Carroll retied the packet, and put it in his pocket. "Then I'll return them to her," he said quietly.

"Hullo!—here—I say," said Prince, starting to his feet.

"I said I would return them to her," repeated Carroll calmly.

"But I never gave them to you! I never consented to their withdrawal from the papers."

"I'm sorry you did not," said Carroll coldly; "it would have been more polite."

"Polite! D—n it, sir! I call this stealing."

"Stealing, Mr. Prince, is a word that might be used by the person who claims these letters to describe the act of any one who would keep them from *her*. It really cannot apply to you or me."

"Once for all, do you refuse to return them to me?" said Prince, pale with anger.

"Decidedly."

"Very well, sir! We shall see." He stepped to the corner and rang a bell. "I have summoned my manager, and will charge you with the theft in his presence."

"I think not."

"And why, sir?"

"Because the presence of a third party would enable me to throw this glove in your face, which, as a gentleman, I couldn't do without witnesses."

Steps were heard along the passage; Prince was no coward in a certain way; neither was he a fool. He knew that Carroll would keep his word; he knew that he should have to fight him; that whatever the issue of the duel was, the cause of the quarrel would be known, and scarcely

redound to his credit. At present there were no witnesses to the offered insult, and none would be wiser. The letters were not worth it. He stepped to the door, opened it, said, "No matter," and closed it again.

He returned with an affectation of carelessness. "You are right. I don't know that I'm called upon to make a scene here which the *law* can do for me as well elsewhere. It will settle pretty quick whether you've got the right to those letters, and whether you've taken the right way to get them, sir."

"I have no desire to evade any responsibility in this matter, legal or otherwise," said Carroll coldly, rising to his feet.

"Look here," said Prince suddenly, with a return of his brusque frankness, "you might have *asked* me for those letters, you know."

"And you wouldn't have given them to me," said Carroll.

Prince laughed. "That's so! I say, captain, did they teach you this sort of strategy at West Point?"

"They taught me that I could neither receive nor give an insult under a white flag," said Carroll pleasantly. "And they allowed me to make exchanges under the same rule. I picked up this pocket-book on the spot where the accident occurred to Dr. West. It is evidently his. I leave it with you, who are his executor."

The instinct of reticence before a man with whom he could never be confidential kept him from alluding to his other discovery.

Prince took the pocket-book, and opened it mechanically. After a moment's scrutiny of the memoranda it contained, his face assumed something of the same concentrated attention it wore at the beginning of the interview. Raising his eyes suddenly to Carroll, he said quickly—

"You have examined it?"

"Only so far as to see that it contained nothing of importance to the person I represent," returned Carroll simply.

The capitalist looked at the young officer's clear eyes Something of embarrassment came into his own as he turned them away.

"Certainly. Only memorandums of the Doctor's business. Quite important to us, you know. But nothing referring to *your* principal." He laughed. "Thank you for the exchange. I say—take a drink!"

"Thank you—no!" returned Carroll, going to the door.

"Well, good-bye."

He held out his hand. Carroll, with his clear eyes still regarding him, passed quietly by the outstretched hand, opened the door, bowed, and made his exit.

A slight flush came into Prince's cheek. Then, as the door closed, he burst into a half-laugh. Had he been a dramatic villain, he would have added to it several lines of soliloquy, in which he would have rehearsed the fact that the opportunity for revenge had "come at last;" that the "haughty victor who had just left with his ill-gotten spoil had put into his hands the weapon of his friend's destruction;" that the "hour had come;" and possibly he might have said, "Ha! ha!" But, being a practical, good-natured, selfish rascal, not much better or worse than his neighbours, he sat himself down at his desk, and began to carefully consider how *he* could best make use of this memoranda jotted down by Dr. West of the proofs of the existence of his son, and the consequent discovery of a legal heir to his property.

CHAPTER VIII.

When Faquita had made sure that her young mistress was so securely closeted with Doña Maria that morning as to be inaccessible to curious eyes and ears, she saw fit to bewail to her fellow-servants this further evidence of the

decay of the old feudal and patriarchal mutual family confidences. "Time was, thou rememberest, Pepita, when an affair of this kind was openly discussed at chocolate with everybody present, and before us all. When Joaquin Padilla was shot at Monterey, it was the Doña herself who told us, who read aloud the letters describing it and the bullet-holes in his clothes, and made it quite a gala-day—and he was a first-cousin of Guitierrez. And now, when this American goat of a doctor is kicked to death by a mule, the family must shut themselves up, that never a question is asked or answered."

"Ay," responded Pepita; "and as regards that, Sanchez there knows as much as they do, for it was he that almost saw the whole affair."

"How?—sawest it?" inquired Faquita eagerly.

"Why, was it not he that was bringing home Pereo, who had been lying in one of his trances or visions—blessed St. Antonio preserve us!" said Pepita, hastily crossing herself—"on Koorotora's grave, when the Doctor's mustang charged down upon them like a wild bull, and the Doctor's foot half out of the stirrups, and he not yet fast in his seat? And Pereo laughs a wild laugh and says, 'Watch if the coyote does not drag yet at his mustang's heels;' and Sanchez ran and watched the Doctor out of sight, careering and galloping to his death!—ay, as Pereo prophesied. For it was only half an hour afterwards that Sanchez again heard the tramp of his hoofs—as if it were here—and knowing it two miles away—thou understandest, he said to himself, 'It is over.'"

The two women shuddered and crossed themselves.

"And what says Pereo of the fulfilment of his prophecy?" asked Faquita, hugging herself in her shawl with a certain titillating shrug of fascinating horror.

"It is even possible he understands it not. Thou knowest how dazed and dumb he ever is after these visions—that he comes from them as one from the grave, re-

membering nothing. He has lain like a log all the morning."

"Ay; but this news should awaken him, if aught can. He loved not this sneaking Doctor. Let us seek him; mayhap Sanchez may be there. Come! The mistress lacks us not just now; the guests are provided for. Come!"

She led the way to the eastern angle of the casa, communicating by a low corridor with the corral and stables. This was the old "gate-keep," or quarters of the mayordomo, who, among his functions, was supposed to exercise a supervision over the exits and entrances of the house. A large steward's room or office, beyond it a room of general assembly, half guard-room, half servants' hall, and Pereo's sleeping-room, constituted his domain. A few peons were gathered in the hall near the open door of the apartment where Pereo lay.

Stretched on a low pallet, his face yellow as wax, a light burning under a crucifix near his head, and a spray of blessed palm, popularly supposed to avert the attempts of evil spirits to gain possession of his suspended faculties, Pereo looked not unlike a corpse. Two muffled and shawled domestics, who sat by his side, might have been mourners, but for their voluble and incessant chattering.

"So thou art here, Faquita?" said a stout virago. "It is a wonder thou couldst spare time from prayers for the repose of the American Doctor's soul to look after the health of thy superior, poor Pereo! Is it, then, true that Doña Maria said she would have nought more to do with the drunken brute of her mayordomo?"

The awful fascination of Pereo's upturned face did not prevent Faquita from tossing her head as she replied, pertly, that she was not there to defend her mistress from lazy gossip. "Nay, but *what* said she?" asked the other attendant.

"She said Pereo was to want for nothing; but at present she could not see him."

A murmur of indignation and sympathy passed through the company. It was followed by a long sigh from the insensible man. "His lips move," said Faquita, still fascinated by curiosity. "Hush! he would speak."

"His lips move, but his soul is still asleep," said Sanchez oracularly. "Thus they have moved since early morning, when I came to speak with him, and found him lying here in a fit upon the floor. He was half dressed, thou seest, as if he had risen to go forth, and had been struck down so"——

"Hush! I tell thee he speaks," said Faquita.

The sick man was faintly articulating through a few tiny bubbles that broke upon his rigid lips. "He—dared—me! He—said—I was old—too old."

"Who dared thee? Who said thou wast too old?" asked the eager Faquita, bending over him.

"He, Koorotora himself! in the shape of a coyote."

Faquita fell back with a little giggle, half of shame, half of awe.

"It is ever thus," said Sanchez sententiously; "it is what he said last night, when I picked him up on the mound. He will sleep now—thou shalt see. He will get no further than Koorotora and the coyote—and then he will sleep."

And to the awe of the group, and the increased respect for Sanchez's wisdom, Pereo seemed to fall again into a lethargic slumber. It was late in the evening when he appeared to regain perfect consciousness. "Ah—what is this?" he said roughly, sitting up in bed, and eyeing the watchers around him, some of whom had succumbed to sleep, and others were engaged in playing cards. "Caramba! are ye mad? Thou, Sanchez, here, who shouldst be at thy work in the stables? Thou, Pepita, is thy mistress asleep or dead, that thou sittest here? Blessed San Antonio! would ye drive me mad?" He lifted his hand to his head with a dull movement of pain, and attempted to rise from the bed.

"Softly, good Pereo; lie still," said Sanchez, approaching him. "Thou hast been ill—so ill. These, thy friends, have

been waiting only for this moment to be assured that thou art better. For this idleness there is no blame—truly none. The Doña Maria has said that thou shouldst lack no care; and truly, since the terrible news there has been little to do."

"The terrible news?" repeated Pereo.

Sanchez cast a meaning glance upon the others, as if to indicate this confirmation of his diagnosis.

"Ay, terrible news! The Doctor West was found this morning dead two miles from the casa."

"Dr. West dead!" repeated Pereo slowly, as if endeavouring to master the real meaning of the words. Then, seeing the vacuity of his question reflected on the faces of those around him, he added hurriedly, with a feeble smile, "O—ay—dead! Yes! I remember. And he has been ill—very ill, eh?"

"It was an accident. He was thrown from his horse, and so killed," returned Sanchez gravely.

"Killed—by his horse, sayest thou?" said Pereo, with a sudden fixed look in his eye.

"Ay, good Pereo. Dost thou not remember when the mustang bolted with him down upon us in the lane, and then thou didst say he would come to evil with the brute? He did—blessed San Antonio!—within half an hour!"

"How—thou sawest it?"

"Nay; for the mustang was running away, and I did not follow. Bueno! it happened all the same. The Alcalde, coroner, who knows all about it, has said so an hour ago! Juan brought the news from the rancho where the inquest was. There will be a funeral the day after to-morrow! and so it is that some of the family will go. Fancy, Pereo, a Guitierrez at the funeral of the Americano Doctor! Nay, I doubt not that the Doña Maria will ask thee to say a prayer over his bier."

"Peace, fool! and speak not of thy lady mistress," thundered the old man, sitting upright. "Begone to the stables. Dost thou hear me? Go!"

"Now, by the Mother of Miracles," said Sanchez, hastening from the room as the gaunt figure of the old man rose, like a sheeted spectre, from the bed, "that was his old self again! Blessed San Antonio! Pereo has recovered."

The next day he was at his usual duties, with perhaps a slight increase of sternness in his manner. The fulfilment of his prophecy, related by Sanchez, added to the superstitious reputation in which he was held, although Faquita voiced the opinions of a growing sceptical party in the statement that it was easy to prophesy the Doctor's accident, with the spectacle of the horse actually running away before the prophet's eyes. It was even said that Doña Maria's aversion to Pereo since the accident arose from a belief that some assistance might have been rendered by him. But it was pointed out by Sanchez that Pereo had, a few moments before, fallen under one of those singular epileptic-like strokes to which he was subject, and not only was unfit, but even required the entire care of Sanchez at the time. He did not attend the funeral, nor did Mrs. Saltonstall; but the family was represented by Maruja and Amita, accompanied by one or two dark-faced cousins, Captain Carroll, and Raymond. A number of friends and business associates from the neighbouring towns, Aladdin and a party from his house, the farm labourers, and a crowd of working men from his mills in the foothills, swelled the assemblage, that met in and around the rude agricultural sheds and outhouses which formed the only pastoral habitation of the rancho of San Antonio. It had been a characteristic injunction of the deceased that he should be buried in the midst of one of his most prolific grain-fields, as a grim return to that nature he was impoverishing, with neither mark nor monument to indicate the spot, and that even the temporary mound above him should at the fitting season of the year be levelled with the rest of the field by the obliterating ploughshares. A grave was accordingly dug about a

quarter of a mile from his office, amidst a "volunteer" crop so dense that the large space mown around the narrow opening to admit of the presence of the multitude seemed like a golden amphitheatre.

A distinguished clergyman from San Francisco officiated. A man of tact and politic adaptation, he dwelt upon the blameless life of the deceased, on his practical benefit for civilisation in the county, and even treated his grim Pantheism in the selection of his grave as a formal recognition of the text "Dust to dust." He paid a not ungrateful compliment to the business associates of the deceased, and without actually claiming in the usual terms "a continuance of past favours" for their successors, managed to interpolate so strong a recommendation of the late Doctor's commercial projects as to elicit from Aladdin the expressive commendation that his sermon was "as good as five per cent. in the stock."

Maruja, who had been standing near the carriage, languidly silent and abstracted even under the tender attentions of Carroll, suddenly felt the consciousness of another pair of eyes fixed on her. Looking up, she was surprised to find herself regarded by the man she had twice met, once as a tramp and once as a wayfarer at the fonda, who had quietly joined a group not far from her. At once impressed by the idea that this was the first time that he had really looked at her, she felt a singular shyness creeping over her, until, to her own astonishment and indignation, she was obliged to lower her eyes before his gaze. In vain she tried to lift them with her old supreme power of fascination. If she had ever blushed, she felt she would have done so now. She knew that her face must betray her consciousness; and at last she—Maruja, the self-poised and all-sufficient goddess—actually turned in half-hysterical and girlish bashfulness to Carroll for relief in an affected and exaggerated absorption of his attentions. She scarcely knew that the clergyman had finished speaking, when

Raymond approached them softly from behind. "Pray don't believe," he said appealingly, "that all the human virtues are about to be buried—I should say sown—in that wheat-field. A few will still survive, and creep about above the Doctor's grave. Listen to a story just told me, and disbelieve—if you dare—in human gratitude. Do you see that picturesque young ruffian over there?"

Maruja did not lift her eyes. She felt herself breathlessly hanging on the speaker's next words.

"Why, that's the young man of the fonda, who picked up your fan," said Carroll; "isn't it?"

"Perhaps," said Maruja indifferently. She would have given worlds to have been able to turn coldly and stare at him at that moment with the others, but she dared not. She contented herself with softly brushing some dust from Captain Carroll's arm with her fan, and a feminine suggestion of tender care which thrilled that gentleman.

"Well," continued Raymond, "that Robert Macaire over yonder came here some three or four days ago as a tramp, in want of everything but honest labour. Our lamented friend consented to parley with him, which was something remarkable in the Doctor; still more remarkable, he gave him a suit of clothes and, it is said, some money, and sent him on his way. Now, more remarkable than all, our friend, on hearing of his benefactor's death, actually tramps back here to attend his funeral. The Doctor being dead, his executors not of a kind to emulate the Doctor's spasmodic generosity, and there being no chance of future favours, the act must be recorded as purely and simply gratitude. By Jove! I don't know but that he is the only one here who can be called a real mourner. I'm here because your sister is here, Carroll comes because *you* do, and you come because your mother cannot."

"And who tells you these pretty stories?" asked Maruja, with her face still turned towards Carroll.

"The foreman, Harrison, who, with an extensive practical

experience of tramps, was struck with this exception to the general rule."

"Poor man! one ought to do something for him," said Amita compassionately.

"What!" said Raymond, with affected terror, "and spoil this perfect story? Never! If I should offer him ten dollars, I'd expect him to kick me; if he took it, I'd expect to kick *him.*"

"He is not so bad-looking, is he, Maruja?" asked Amita of her sister. But Maruja had already moved a few paces off with Carroll, and seemed to be listening to him only. Raymond smiled at the pretty perplexity of Amita's eyebrows over this pronounced indiscretion.

"Don't mind them," he whispered; "you really cannot expect to dueña your elder sister. Tell me, would you actually like me to see if I could assist the virtuous tramp? You have only to speak." But Amita's interest appeared to be so completely appeased with Raymond's simple offer that she only smiled, blushed, and said "No."

Maruja's quick ears had taken in every word of these asides, and for an instant she hated her sister for her aimless declination of Raymond's proposal. But becoming conscious—under her eyelids—that the stranger was moving away with the dispersing crowd, she rejoined Amita with her usual manner. The others had re-entered the carriage, but Maruja took it into her head to proceed on foot to the rude building whence the mourners had issued. The foreman Harrison, flushed and startled by this apparition of inaccessible beauty at his threshold, came eagerly forward. "I shall not trouble you now, Mr. Har-r-r-rison," she said, with a polite exaggeration of the consonants; "but some day I shall ride over here, and ask you to show me your wonderful machines."

She smiled, and turned back to seek her carriage. But before she had gone many yards she found that she had completely lost it in the intervening billows of grain. She

stopped with an impatient little Spanish ejaculation. The next moment the stalks of wheat parted before her and a figure emerged. It was the stranger.

She fell back a step in utter helplessness. He, on his side, retreated again into the wheat, holding it back with extended arms to let her pass. As she moved forward mechanically, without a word he moved backward, making a path for her until she was able to discern the coachman's whip above the bending heads of the grain just beyond her. He stopped here and drew to one side, his arms still extended, to give her free passage. She tried to speak, but could only bow her head, and slipped by him with a strange feeling—suggested by his attitude—that she was evading his embrace. But the next moment his arms were lowered, the grain closed around him, and he was lost to her view. She reached the carriage almost unperceived by the inmates, and pounced upon her sister with a laugh.

"Blessed Virgin!" said Amita, "where did you come from?"

"From there!" said Maruja, with a slight nervous shiver, pointing to the clustering grain.

"We were afraid you were lost."

"So was I," said Maruja, raising her pretty lashes heavenwards, as she drew a shawl tightly round her shoulders.

"Has anything happened? You look strange," said Carroll, drawing closer to her.

Her eyes were sparkling, but she was very pale.

"Nothing, nothing!" she said hastily, glancing at the grain again.

"If it were not that the haste would have been absolutely indecent, I should say that the late Doctor had made you a ghostly visit," said Raymond, looking at her curiously.

"He would have been polite enough not to have commented on my looks," said Maruja. "Am I really such a fright?"

Carroll thought he had never seen her so beautiful. Her eyelids were quivering over their fires as if they had been brushed by the passing wing of a strong passion.

"What are you thinking of?" said Carroll, as they drove on.

She was thinking that the stranger had looked at her admiringly, and that his eyes were blue. But she looked quietly into her lover's face, and said sweetly, "Nothing, I fear, that would interest you!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE news of the assignment of Dr. West's property to Mrs. Saltonstall was followed by the still more astonishing discovery that the Doctor's will further bequeathed to her his entire property, after payment of his debts and liabilities. It was given in recognition of her talents and business integrity during their late association, and as an evidence of the confidence and "undying affection" of the testator. Nevertheless, after the first surprise, the fact was accepted by the community as both natural and proper under that singular instinct of humanity which acquiesces without scruple in the union of two large fortunes, but sharply questions the conjunction of poverty and affluence, and looks only for interested motives where there is disparity of wealth. Had Mrs. Saltonstall been a poor widow instead of a rich one; had she been the Doctor's housekeeper instead of his business friend, the bequest would have been strongly criticised—if not legally tested. But this combination, which placed the entire valley of San Antonio in the control of a single individual, appeared to be perfectly legitimate. More than that, some vague rumour of the Doctor's past, and his early entanglements, only seemed to make this eminently practical disposition of his

property the more respectable, and condoned for any moral irregularities of his youth.

The effect upon the collateral branches of the Guitierrez family and the servants and retainers was even more impressive. For once it seemed that the fortunes and traditions of the family were changed; the female Guitierrez, instead of impoverishing the property, had augmented it; the foreigner and intruder had been despoiled; the fate of La Mision Perdida had been changed; the curse of Koorotora had proved a blessing; his prophet and descendant, Pereo, the mayordomo, moved in an atmosphere of superstitious adulation and respect among the domestics and common people. This recognition of his power he received at times with a certain exaltation of grandiloquent pride beyond the conception of any but a Spanish servant, and at times with a certain dull, pained vacancy of perception and an expression of frightened bewilderment which also went far to establish his reputation as an unconscious seer and thaumaturgist. "Thou seest," said Sanchez to the partly sceptical Faquita, "he does not know more than an infant what is his power. That is the proof of it." The Doña Maria alone did not participate in this appreciation of Pereo, and when it was proposed that a feast or celebration of rejoicing should be given under the old pear-tree by the Indian's mound, her indignation was long remembered by those that witnessed it. "It is not enough that we have been made ridiculous in the past," she said to Maruja, "by the interference of this solemn fool, but that the memory of our friend is to be insulted by his generosity being made into a triumph of Pereo's idiotic ancestor. One would have thought those coyotes and Koorotora's bones had been buried with the cruel gossip of your relations"—(it had been the recent habit of Doña Maria to allude to "the family" as being particularly related to Maruja alone)—"over my poor friend. Let him beware that his ancestor's mound is not uprooted with the pear-tree and his heathenish temple destroyed.

If, as the engineer says, a branch of the new railroad can be established for La Mision Perdida, I agree with him that it can better pass at that point with less sacrifice to the domain. It is the one uncultivated part of the park, and lies at the proper angle."

"You surely would not consent to this, my mother?" said Maruja, with a sudden impression of a newly-found force in her mother's character.

"Why not, child?" said the relict of Mr. Saltonstall and the mourner of Dr. West coldly. "I admit it was discreet of thee in old times to have thy sentimental passages there with caballeros who, like the guests of the hidalgo that kept a skeleton at his feast, were reminded of the mutability of their hopes by Koorotora's bones and the legend. But with the explosion of this idea of a primal curse, like Eve's, on the property," added the Doña Maria, with a slight bitterness, "thou mayest have thy *citas*—elsewhere. Thou canst scarcely keep this Captain Carroll any longer at a distance by rattling those bones of Koorotora in his face. And of a truth, child, since the affair of the letters, and his discreet and honourable conduct since, I see not why thou shouldst. He has thy mother's reputation in his hands."

"He is a gentleman, my mother," said Maruja quietly.

"And they are scarce, child, and should be rewarded and preserved. That is what I meant, silly one; this Captain is not rich—but then, thou hast enough for both."

"But it was Amita that first brought him here," said Maruja, looking down with an air of embarrassed thoughtfulness, which Doña Maria chose to instantly accept as exaggerated coyness.

"Do not think to deceive me or thyself, child, with this folly. Thou art old enough to know a man's mind, if not thine own. Besides, I do not know that I shall object to her liking for Raymond. He is very clever, and would be a relief to some of thy relatives. He would be invaluable to us in the emergencies that may grow out of these

mechanical affairs that I do not understand—such as the mill and the railroad."

"And you propose to take a few husbands as partners in the business?" said Maruja, who had recovered her spirits. "I warn you that Captain Carroll is as stupid as a gentleman could be. I wonder that he has not blundered in other things as badly as he has in preferring me to Amita. He confided to me only last night that he had picked up a pocket-book belonging to the Doctor and given it to Aladdin without a witness or receipt, and evidently of his own accord."

"A pocket-book of the Doctor's?" repeated Doña Maria.

"Ay; but it contained nothing of thine," said Maruja. "The poor child had sense enough to think of that. But I am in no hurry to ask your consent and your blessing yet, little mother. I could even bear that Amita should precede me to the altar, if the exigencies of thy 'business' require it. It might also secure Captain Carroll for me. Nay, look not at me in that cheapening, commercial way—with compound interest in thine eyes. I am not so poor an investment, truly, of thy original capital."

"Thou art thy father's child," said her mother, suddenly kissing her; "and that is saying enough, the blessed Virgin knows. Go now," she continued, gently pushing her from the room, "and send Amita hither." She watched the disappearance of Maruja's slightly rebellious shoulders, and added to herself, "And this is the child that Amita really believes is pining with love-sickness for Carroll, so that she can neither sleep nor eat. This is the girl that Faquita would have me think hath no longer any heart in her dress or in her finery! Soul of Joseph Saltonstall!" ejaculated the widow, lifting her shoulders and her eyes together, "thou hast much to account for."

Two weeks later she again astonished her daughter. "Why dost thou not join the party that drives over to see the wonders of Aladdin's Palace to-day? It would seem

more proper that thou shouldst accompany thy guests than Raymond and Amita."

"I have never entered his doors since the day he was disrespectful to my mother's daughter," said Maruja, in surprise.

"Disrespectful!" repeated Doña Maria impatiently. "Thy father's daughter ought to know that such as he may be ignorant and vulgar, but cannot be disrespectful to her. And there are offences, child, it is much more crushing to forget than to remember. As long as he has not the presumption to *apologise*, I see no reason why thou mayst not go. He has not been here since that affair of the letters. I shall not permit him to be uncivil over *that* —dost thou understand? He is of use to me in business. Thou mayst take Carroll with thee; he will understand that."

"But Carroll will not go," said Maruja. "He will not say what passed between them, but I suspect they quarrelled."

"All the better, then, that thou goest alone. He need not be reminded of it. Fear not but that he will be only too proud of thy visit to think of aught else."

Maruja, who seemed relieved at this prospect of being unaccompanied by Captain Carroll, shrugged her shoulders and assented.

When the party that afternoon drove into the courtyard of Aladdin's Palace, the announcement that its hospitable proprietor was absent and would not return until dinner did not abate either their pleasure or their curiosity. As already intimated to the reader, Mr. Prince's functions as host were characteristically irregular, and the servant's suggestion that Mr. Prince's private secretary would attend to do the honours created little interest, and was laughingly waived by Maruja. "There really is not the slightest necessity to trouble the gentleman," she said politely. 'I know the house thoroughly, and I think I have shown it

once or twice before for your master. Indeed," she added, turning to her party, "I have been already complimented on my skill as a cicerone." After a pause, she continued, with a slight exaggeration of action and in her deepest contralto, "Ahem, ladies and gentlemen, the hall and court in which we are now standing is a perfect copy of the Court of Lions at the Alhambra, and was finished in fourteen days in white pine, gold, and plaster at a cost of ten thousand dollars. A photograph of the original structure hangs on the wall: you will observe, ladies and gentlemen, that the reproduction is perfect. The Alhambra is in Granada, a province of Spain, which is said in some respects to resemble California, where you have probably observed the Spanish language is still spoken by the old settlers. We now cross the stable-yard on a bridge which is a facsimile in appearance and dimensions of the Bridge of Sighs at Venice connecting the Doge's Palace with the State Prison. Here, on the contrary, instead of being ushered into a dreary dungeon, as in the great original, a fresh surprise awaits us. Allow me, ladies and gentlemen, to precede you for the surprise. We open a door thus—and—presto!"——

She stopped, speechless, on the threshold; the fan fell from her gesticulating hand.

In the centre of a brilliantly-lit conservatory, with golden columns, a young man was standing. As her fan dropped on the tessellated pavement, he came forward, picked it up, and put it in her rigid and mechanical fingers. The party, who had applauded her apparently artistic climax, laughingly pushed by her into the conservatory, without noticing her agitation.

It was the same face and figure she remembered as last standing before her, holding back the crowding grain in the San Antonio field. But here he was apparelled and appointed like a gentleman, and even seemed to be superior to the garish glitter of his new surroundings.

"I believe I have the pleasure of speaking to Miss Saltonstall," he said, with the faintest suggestion of his former manner in his half-resentful sidelong glance. "I hear that you offered to dispense with my services, but I knew that Mr. Prince would scarcely be satisfied if I did not urge it once more upon you in person. I am his private secretary."

At the same moment, Amita and Raymond, attracted by the conversation, turned towards him. Their recognition of the man they had seen at Dr. West's was equally distinct. The silence became embarrassing. Two pretty girls of the party pressed to Amita's side, with half-audible whispers. "What is it?" "Who's your handsome and wicked-looking friend?" "Is this the surprise?"

At the sound of their voices Maruja recovered herself coldly. "Ladies," she said, with a slight wave of her fan, "this is Mr. Prince's private secretary. I believe it is hardly fair to take up his valuable time. Allow me to thank you, sir, FOR PICKING UP MY FAN!"

With a single subtle flash of the eye she swept by him, taking her companions to the other end of the conservatory. When she turned, he was gone.

"This was certainly an unexpected climax," said Raymond mischievously. "Did you really arrange it beforehand? We leave a picturesque tramp at the edge of a grave; we pass over six weeks and a Bridge of Sighs, and hey, presto! we find a private secretary in a conservatory! This is quite the regular Aladdin business."

"You may laugh," said Maruja, who had recovered her spirits, "but if you were really clever you'd find out what it all means. Don't you see that Amita is dying of curiosity?"

"Let us fly at once and discover the secret, then," said Raymond, slipping Amita's arm through his. "We will consult the oracle in the stables. Come."

The others followed, leaving Maruja for an instant alone. She was about to rejoin them when she heard footsteps in

the passage they had just crossed, and then perceived that the young stranger had merely withdrawn to allow the party to precede him before he returned to the other building through the conservatory, which he was just entering. In turning quickly to escape, the black lace of her over-skirt caught in the spines of a snaky-looking cactus. She stopped to disengage herself with feverish haste in vain. She was about to sacrifice the delicate material in her impatience, when the young man stepped quietly to her side.

"Allow me. Perhaps I have more patience, even if I have less time," he said, stooping down.

Their ungloved hands touched. Maruja stopped in her efforts and stood up. He continued until he had freed the luckless flounce, conscious of the soft fire of her eyes on his head and neck.

"There," he said, rising, and encountering her glance. As she did not speak, he continued, "You are thinking, Miss Saltonstall, that you have seen me before, are you not? Well—you *have;* I asked you the road to San José one morning when I was tramping by your hedge."

"And as you probably were looking for something better —which you seem to have found—you didn't care to listen to *my* directions," said Maruja quickly.

"I found a man—almost the only one who ever offered me a gratuitous kindness—at whose grave I afterwards met you. I found another man who befriended me here—where I meet you again."

She was beginning to be hysterically nervous lest any one should return and find them together. She was conscious of a tingling of vague shame. Yet she lingered. The strange fascination of his half-savage melancholy, and a reproachfulness that seemed to arraign her, with the rest of the world, at the bar of his vague resentment, held the delicate fibres of her sensitive being as cruelly and relentlessly as the thorns of the cactus had gripped her silken lace. Without knowing what she was saying, she stammered

that she "was glad he connected her with his better fortune," and began to move away. He noticed it with his sidelong lids, and added, with a slight bitterness—

"I don't think I should have intruded here again, but I thought you had gone. But I—I—am afraid you have not seen the last of me. It was the intention of my employer, Mr. Prince, to introduce me to you and your mother. I suppose he considers it part of my duties here. I must warn you that, if you are here when he returns, he will insist upon it, and upon your meeting me with these ladies at dinner."

"Perhaps so—he is my mother's friend," said Maruja; "but you have the advantage of us—you can always take to the road, you know."

The smile with which she had intended to accompany this speech did not come as readily in execution as it had in conception, and she would have given worlds to have recalled her words. But he said, "That's so," quietly, and turned away, as if to give her an opportunity to escape. She moved hesitatingly towards the passage and stopped. The sound of the returning voices gave her a sudden courage.

"Mr."——

"Guest," said the young man.

"If we do conclude to stay to dinner, as Mr. Prince has said nothing of introducing you to my sister, you must let *me* have that pleasure."

He lifted his eyes to hers with a sudden flush. But she had fled.

She reached her party, displaying her torn flounce as the cause of her delay, and there was a slight quickness in her breathing and her speech which was attributed to the same grave reason.

"But, only listen," said Amita, "we've got it all out of the butler and the grooms. It's such a romantic story!"

"What is?" said Maruja suddenly.

"Why, the private tramp's."

"The peripatetic secretary," suggested Raymond.

"Yes," continued Amita, "Mr. Prince was so struck with his gratitude to the old Doctor, that he hunted him up in San José, and brought him here. Since then Prince has been so interested in him—it appears he was somebody in the States, or has rich relations—that he has been telegraphing and making all sorts of inquiries about him, and has even sent out his own lawyer to hunt up everything about him. Are you listening?"

"Yes."

"You seem abstracted."

"I am hungry."

"Why not dine here? it's an hour earlier than at home. Aladdin would fall at your feet for the honour. Do!"

Maruja looked at them with innocent vagueness, as if the possibility were just beginning to dawn upon her.

"And Clara Wilson is just dying to see the mysterious unknown again. Say yes, little Maruja."

Little Maruja glanced at them with a large maternal compassion. "We shall see."

Mr. Prince, on his return an hour later, was unexpectedly delighted with Maruja's gracious acceptance of his invitation to dinner. He was thoroughly sensible of the significance which his neighbours had attached to the avoidance by the Saltonstall heiress of his various parties and gorgeous festivities ever since a certain act of indiscretion—now alleged to have been produced by the exaltation of wine—had placed him under ban. Whatever his feelings were towards her mother, he could not fail to appreciate fully this act of the daughter, which rehabilitated him. It was with more than his usual extravagance—shown even in a certain exaggeration of respect towards Maruja—that he welcomed the party, and made preparations for the dinner. The telegraph and mounted messengers were put into rapid requisition. The bridal suite was placed at the disposal of

the young ladies for a dressing-room. The attendant genii surpassed themselves. The evening dresses of Maruja, Amita, and the Misses Wilson, summoned by electricity from La Mision Perdida, and despatched by the fleetest conveyances, were placed in the arms of their maids, smothered with bouquets, an hour before dinner. An operatic concert troupe, passing through the nearest town, were diverted from their course by the slaves of the ring to discourse hidden music in the music-room during dinner. "Bite my finger, Sweetlips," said Miss Clara Wilson, who had a neat taste for apt quotation, to Maruja, "that I may see if I am awake. It's the Arabian Nights all over again!"

The dinner was a marvel, even in a land of gastronomic marvels; the dessert a miracle of fruits, even in a climate that bore the products of two zones. Maruja, from her seat beside her satisfied host, looked across a bank of yellow roses at her sister and Raymond, and was timidly conscious of the eyes of young Guest, who was seated at the other end of the table, between the two Misses Wilson. With a strange haunting of his appearance on the day she first met him, she stole glances of half-frightened curiosity at him while he was eating, and was relieved to find that he used his knife and fork like the others, and that his appetite was far from voracious. It was his employer who was the first to recall the experiences of his past life, with a certain enthusiasm and the air of a host anxious to contribute to the entertainment of his guests. "You'd hardly believe, Miss Saltonstall, that that young gentleman over there walked across the Continent—and two thousand odd miles, wasn't it?—all alone, and with not much more in the way of traps than he's got on now. Tell 'em, Harry, how the Apaches nearly gobbled you up, and then let you go because they thought you as good an Injun as any one of them, and how you lived a week in the desert on two biscuits as big as that." A chorus of entreaty and delighted anticipation followed the suggestion. The old expression of being

at bay returned for an instant to Guest's face, but, lifting his eyes, he caught a look of almost sympathetic anxiety from Maruja's, who had not spoken.

"It became necessary for me, some time ago," said Guest, half explanatorily, to Maruja, "to be rather explicit in the details of my journey here, and I told Mr. Prince some things which he seems to think interesting to others. That is all. To save my life on one occasion, I was obliged to show myself as good as an Indian, in his own way, and I lived among them and travelled with them for two weeks. I have been hungry, as I suppose others have on like occasions, but nothing more."

Nevertheless, in spite of his evident reticence, he was obliged to give way to their entreaties, and, with a certain grim and uncompromising truthfulness of statement, recounted some episodes of his journey. It was none the less thrilling that he did it reluctantly, and in much the same manner as he had answered his father's questions, and as he had probably responded to the later cross-examination of Mr. Prince. He did not tell it emotionally, but rather with the dogged air of one who had been subjected to a personal grievance for which he neither asked nor expected sympathy. When he did not raise his eyes to Maruja's he kept them fixed on his plate.

"Well," said Prince, when a long-drawn sigh of suspended emotion among the guests testified to his powers as a caterer to their amusement, "what do you say to some music with our coffee to follow the story?"

"It's more like a play," said Amita to Raymond. "What a pity Captain Carroll, who knows all about Indians, isn't here to have enjoyed it. But I suppose Maruja, who hasn't lost a word, will tell it to him."

"I don't think she will," said Raymond drily, glancing at Maruja, who, lost in some intricate pattern of her Chinese plate, was apparently unconscious that her host was waiting her signal to withdraw. At last she raised

her head, and said gently but audibly to the waiting Prince—

"It is positively a newer pattern; the old one had not that delicate straw line in the arabesque. You must have had it made for you."

"I did," said the gratified Prince, taking up the plate. "What eyes you have, Miss Saltonstall. They see everything."

"Except that I'm keeping you all waiting," she returned with a smile, letting the eyes in question fall with a half-parting salutation on Guest as she rose. It was the first exchange of a common instinct between them, and left them as conscious as if they had pressed hands.

The music gave an opportunity for some desultory conversation, in which Mr. Prince and his young friend received an invitation from Maruja to visit La Mision, and the party, by a common consent, turned into the conservatory, where the genial host begged them each to select a flower from a few especially rare exotics.

When Maruja received hers, she said laughingly to Prince, "Will you think me very importunate if I ask for another?"

"Take what you like—you have only to name it," he replied gallantly.

"But that's just what I can't do," responded the young girl, "unless," she added, turning to Guest, "unless you can assist me. It was the plant I was examining to-day."

"I think I can show it to you," said Guest, with a slight increase of colour, as he preceded her towards the memorable cactus near the door; "but I doubt if it has any flower."

Nevertheless, it had. A bright red blossom, like a spot of blood drawn by one of its thorns. He plucked it for her, and she placed it in her belt.

"You are forgiving," he said admiringly.

"*You* ought to know that," she returned, looking down.

"*I?*—why?"

"You were rude to me twice."

"Twice!"

"Yes—once at the Mision of La Perdida; once in the road at San Antonio."

His eyes became downcast and gloomy. "At the Mision that morning, I, a wretched outcast, only saw in you a beautiful girl intent on overriding me with her merciless beauty. At San Antonio, I handed the fan I picked up to the man whose eyes told me he loved you."

She started impatiently. "You might have been more gallant, and found more difficulty in the selection," she said pertly. "But since when have you gentlemen become so observant and so punctilious? Would you expect him to be as considerate of others?"

"I have few claims that any one seems bound to respect," he returned brusquely. Then, in a softer voice, he added, looking at her gently, "You were in mourning when you came here this afternoon, Miss Saltonstall."

"Was I? It was for Dr. West—my mother's friend."

"It was very becoming to you."

"You are complimenting me. But I warn you that Captain Carroll said something better than that; he said mourning was not necessary for me. I had only to 'put my eyelashes at half-mast.' He is a soldier, you know."

"He seems to be as witty as he is fortunate," said Guest bitterly.

"Do you think he is fortunate?" said Maruja, raising her eyes to his. There was so much in this apparently simple question that Guest looked in her eyes for a suggestion. What he saw there for an instant made his heart stop beating. She apparently did not know it, for she began to tremble too.

"Is he not?" said Guest, in a low voice.

"Do you think he ought to be?" she found herself whispering.

A sudden silence fell upon them. The voices of their companions seemed very far in the distance; the warm breath of the flowers appeared to be drowning their senses; they tried to speak, but could not; they were so near to each other that the two long blades of a palm served to hide them. In the midst of this profound silence a voice that was like and yet unlike Maruja's said twice, "Go! go!" but each time seemed hushed in the stifling silence. The next moment the palms were pushed aside, the dark figure of a young man slipped like some lithe animal through the shrubbery, and Maruja found herself standing, pale and rigid, in the middle of the walk in the full glare of the light, and looking down the corridor toward her approaching companions. She was furious and frightened; she was triumphant and trembling; without thought, sense, or reason, she had been kissed by Henry Guest, and—had returned it.

The fleetest horses of Aladdin's stud that night could not carry her far enough or fast enough to take her away from that moment, that scene, and that sensation. Wise and experienced, confident in her beauty, secure in her selfishness, strong over others' weaknesses, weighing accurately the deeds and words of men and women, recognising all there was in position and tradition, seeing with her father's clear eyes the practical meaning of any divergence from that conventionality which, as a woman of the world, she valued, she returned again and again to the trembling joy of that intoxicating moment. She thought of her mother and sisters, of Raymond and Garnier, of Aladdin—she even forced herself to think of Carroll—only to shut her eyes with a faint smile, and dream again the brief but thrilling dream of Guest that began and ended in their joined and parted lips. Small wonder that, hidden and silent in her enwrappings, as she lay back in the carriage with her pale face against the cold, starry sky, two other stars came out and glistened and trembled on her passion-fringed lashes.

CHAPTER X.

THE rainy season had set in early. The last three weeks of summer drought had drained the great valley of its life-blood; the dead stalks of grain rustled like dry bones over Dr. West's grave. The dessicating wind and sun had wrought some disenchanting cracks and fissures in Aladdin's Palace, and otherwise disjoined it, so that it not only looked as if it were ready to be packed away, but had become finally untenable in the furious onset of the south-westerly rains. The gorgeous furniture of the reception-rooms was wrapped in macintoshes, the conservatory was changed into an aquarium, the Bridge of Sighs crossed an actual canal in the stable-yard. Only the billiard-room and Mr. Prince's bedroom and office remained intact, and in the latter, one stormy afternoon, Mr. Prince himself sat busy over his books and papers. His station-waggon, splashed and streaked with mud, stood in the courtyard, just as it had been driven from the station, and the smell of the smoke of newly-lit fires showed that the house had been opened only for this hurried visit of its owner.

The tramping of horse hoofs in the courtyard was soon followed by steps along the corridor, and the servant ushered Captain Carroll into the presence of his master. The Captain did not remove his military overcoat, but remained standing erect in the centre of the room, with his forage cap in his hand.

"I could have given you a lift from the station," said Prince, "if you had come that way. I've only just got in myself."

"I preferred to ride," said Carroll drily.

"Sit down by the fire," said Prince, motioning to a chair, "and dry yourself."

"I must ask you first the purport of this interview," said Carroll curtly, "before I prolong it further. You have

asked me to come here in reference to certain letters I returned to their rightful owner some months ago. If you seek to reclaim them again, or to refer to a subject which must remain forgotten, I decline to proceed further."

"It *does* refer to the letters, and it rests with you whether they shall be forgotten or not. It is not my fault if the subject has been dropped. You must remember that until yesterday you have been absent on a tour of inspection and could not be applied to before."

Carroll cast a cold glance at Prince, and then threw himself into a chair, with his overcoat still on and his long military boots crossed before the fire. Sitting there in profile, Prince could not but notice that he looked older and sterner than at their last interview, and his cheeks were thinned as if by something more than active service.

"When you were here last summer," began Prince, leaning forward over his desk, "you brought me a piece of news that astounded me, as it did many others. It was the assignment of Dr. West's property to Mrs. Saltonstall. That was something there was no gainsaying; it was a purely business affair, and involved nobody's rights but the assignor. But this was followed a day or two after by the announcement of the Doctor's will, making the same lady the absolute and sole inheritor of the same property. That seemed all right too; for there were, apparently, no legal heirs. Since then, however, it has been discovered that there is a legal heir—none other than the Doctor's only son. Now, as no allusion to the son's existence was made in that will—which was a great oversight of the Doctor's—it is a fiction of the law that such an omission is an act of forgetfulness, and therefore leaves the son the same rights as if there had been no will at all. In other words, if the Doctor had seen fit to throw his scapegrace son a hundred-dollar bill, it would have been legal evidence that he remembered him. As he did not, it's a fair legal presumption that he forgot him, or that the will is incomplete."

"This seems to be a question for Mrs. Saltonstall's lawyers —not for her friends," said Carroll coldly.

"Excuse me; that remains for you to decide—when you hear all. You understand at present, then, that Dr. West's property, both by assignment and will, was made over in the event of his death not to his legal heirs, but to a comparative stranger. It looked queer to a good many people, but the only explanation was, that the Doctor had fallen very much in love with the widow—that he would have probably married her, had he lived."

With an unpleasant recollection that this was almost exactly Maruja's explanation of her mother's relations to Dr. West, Carroll returned impatiently, "If you mean that their private relations may be made the subject of legal discussion in the event of litigation in regard to the property, that again is a matter for Mrs. Saltonstall to decide—and not her friends. It is purely a matter of taste."

"It may be a matter of discretion, Captain Carroll."

"Of discretion!" repeated Carroll superciliously.

"Well," said Prince, leaving his desk and coming to the fireplace with his hands in his pockets, "what would you call it, if it could be found that Dr. West, on leaving Mrs. Saltonstall's that night, did *not* meet with an accident, was *not* thrown from his horse, but was coolly and deliberately murdered!"

Captain Carroll's swift recollection of the discovery he himself had made in the road, and its inconsistency with the accepted theory of the accident, unmistakably showed itself in his face. It was a moment before he recovered himself.

"But even if it can be proved to have been a murder and not an accident, what has that to do with Mrs. Saltonstall or her claim to the property?"

"Only that she was the one person directly benefited by his death."

Captain Carroll looked at him steadily, and then rose

to his feet. "Do I understand that you have called me here to listen to this infamous aspersion of a lady?"

"I have called you here, Captain Carroll, to listen to the arguments that may be used to set aside Dr. West's will, and return the property to the legal heir. You are to listen to them or not, as you choose; but I warn you that your opportunity to hear them in confidence and convey them to your friend will end here. *I* have no opinion in the case. *I* only tell you that it will be argued that Dr. West was unduly influenced to make a will in Mrs. Saltonstall's favour; that, after having done so, it will be shown that just before his death he became aware of the existence of his son and heir, and actually had an interview with him; that he visited Mrs. Saltonstall that evening with the records of his son's identity and a memorandum of his interview in his pocket-book; and that an hour after leaving the house he was foully murdered. That is the theory which Mrs. Saltonstall has to consider. I told you I have no opinion. I only know that there are witnesses to the interview of the Doctor and his son; there is evidence of murder, and the murderer is suspected; there is the evidence of the pocket-book, with the memorandum picked up on the spot, which you handed me yourself."

"Do you mean to say that you will permit this pocket-book, handed you in confidence, to be used for such an infamous purpose?" said Carroll.

"I think you offered it to me in exchange for Dr. West's letters to Mrs. Saltonstall," returned Prince drily. "The less said about that, the less is likely to be said about compromising letters written by the widow to the Doctor, which she got you to recover—letters which they may claim had a bearing on the case, and even lured him to his fate."

For an instant Captain Carroll recoiled before the gulf which seemed to open at the feet of the unhappy family. For an instant a terrible doubt possessed him, and in that doubt he found a new reason for a certain changed and

altered tone in Maruja's later correspondence with him, and the vague hints she had thrown out of the impossibility of their union. "I beg you will not press me to greater candour," she had written, "and try to forget me before you learn to hate me." For an instant he believed—and even took a miserable comfort in the belief—that it was this hideous secret, and not some coquettish caprice, to which she vaguely alluded. But it was only for a moment, the next instant the monstrous doubt passed from the mind of the simple gentleman, with only a slight flush of shame at his momentary disloyalty.

Prince, however, had noticed it, not without a faint sense of sympathy. "Look here!" he said, with a certain brusqueness, which in a man of his character was less dangerous than his smoothness. "I know your feelings to that family—at least to one of them—and if I've been playing it pretty rough on you, it's only because you played it rather rough on *me* the last time you were here. Let's understand each other. I'll go so far as to say *I* don't believe that Mrs. Saltonstall had anything to do with that murder, but, as a business man, I'm bound to say that these circumstances and her own indiscretion are quite enough to bring the biggest pressure down on her. I wouldn't want any better 'bear' on the market value of her rights than this. Take it at its best. Say that the Coroner's verdict is set aside, and a charge of murder against unknown parties is made"——

"One moment, Mr. Prince," said Carroll. "I shall be one of the first to insist that this is done, and I have confidence enough in Mrs. Saltonstall's honest friendship for the Doctor to know that she will lose no time in pursuing his murderers."

Prince looked at Carroll with a feeling of half envy and half pity. "I think not," he said drily; "for all suspicion points to one man as the perpetrator, and that man was Mrs. Saltonstall's confidential servant—the mayordomo

Pereo." He waited for a moment for the effect of this announcement on Carroll, and then went on, "You now understand that even if Mrs. Saltonstall is acquitted of any connivance with or even knowledge of the deed, she will hardly enjoy the prosecution of her confidential servant for murder."

"But how can this be prevented? If, as you say, there are actual proofs, why have they not been acted upon before? What can keep them from being acted upon now?"

"The proofs have been collected by one man, have been in possession of one man, and will only pass out of his possession when it is for the benefit of the legal heir—who does not yet even know of their existence."

"And who is this one man?"

"Myself."

"You?—You?" said Carroll, advancing towards him. "Then this is *your* work!"

"Captain Carroll," said Prince, without moving, but drawing his lips tightly together and putting his head on one side, "I don't propose to have another scene like the one we had at our last meeting. If you try on anything of that kind, I shall put the whole matter into a lawyer's hands. I don't say that you won't regret it; I don't say that *I* shan't be disappointed too, for I have been managing this thing purely as a matter of business with a view to profiting by it. It so happens that we can both work to the same end, even if our motives are not the same. I don't call myself an officer and a gentleman, but I reckon I've run this affair about as delicately as the best of them, and with a d—d sight more horse sense. I want this thing hushed up and compromised to get some control of the property again, and to prevent it depreciating, as it would, in litigation; you want it hushed up for the sake of the girl and your future mother-in-law. I don't know anything about your laws of honour, but I've laid my cards on the table for you to see, without asking what you've got in your

hand. You can play the game or leave the board, as you choose." He turned and walked to the window—not without leaving on Carroll's mind a certain sense of firmness, truthfulness, and sincerity which commanded his respect.

"I withdraw any remark that might have seemed to reflect on your business integrity, Mr. Prince," said Carroll quietly. "I am willing to admit that you have managed this thing better than I could, and if I join you in an act to suppress these revelations, I have no right to judge of your intentions. What do you propose to have me do?"

"To state the whole case to Mrs. Saltonstall, and to ask her to acknowledge the young man's legal claim without litigation."

"But how do you know that she would not do this without—excuse me—without intimidation?"

"I only reckon that a woman clever enough to get hold of a million, would be clever enough to keep it—against others."

"I hope to show you are mistaken. But where is this heir?"

"Here."

"Here?"

"Yes. For the last six months he has been my private secretary. I know what you are thinking of, Captain Carroll. You would consider it indelicate—eh? Well, that's just where we differ. By this means I have kept everything in my own hands—prevented him from getting into the hands of outsiders—and I intend to dispose of just as much of the facts to him as may be necessary for him to prove his title. What bargain I may make with *him*—is my affair."

"Does he suspect the murder?"

"No. I did not think it necessary for his good or mine. He can be an ugly devil if he likes, and although there wasn't much love lost between him and the old man, it

wouldn't pay to have any revenge mixed up with business. He knows nothing of it. It was only by accident that, looking after his movements while he was here, I ran across the tracks of the murderer."

"But what has kept him from making known his claim to the Saltonstalls? Are you sure he has not?" said Carroll, with a sudden thought that it might account for Maruja's strangeness.

"Positive. He's too proud to make a claim unless he could thoroughly prove it, and only a month ago he made me promise to keep it dark. He's too lazy to trouble himself about it much anyway—as far as I can see. D—d if I don't think his being a tramp has made him lose his taste for everything! Don't worry yourself about *him.* He isn't likely to make confidences with the Saltonstalls, for he don't like 'em, and never went there but once. Instinctively or not, the widow didn't cotton to him; and I fancy Miss Maruja has some old grudge against him for that fan business on the road. She isn't a girl to forgive or forget anything, as I happen to know," he added, with an uneasy laugh.

Carroll was too preoccupied with the danger that seemed to threaten his friends from this surly pretender to resent Prince's tactless allusion. He was thinking of Maruja's ominous agitation at his presence at Dr. West's grave. "Do they suspect him at all?" he asked hurriedly.

"How should they! He goes by the name of Guest—which was his father's real name until changed by an act of legislation when he first came here. Nobody remembers it. We only found it out from his papers. It was quite legal, as all his property was acquired under the name of West."

Carroll rose and buttoned his overcoat. "I presume you are able to offer conclusive proofs of everything you have asserted?"

"Perfectly."

"I am going to the Mision Perdida now," said Captain Carroll quietly. "To-morrow I will bring you the answer —Peace or War." He walked to the door, lifted his hand to his cap with a brief military salutation, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XI.

As Captain Carroll urged his horse along the miry road to La Mision Perdida, he was struck with certain changes in the landscape before him other than those wrought by the winter rains. There were the usual deep gullies and trenches, half-filled with water, in the fields and along the road, but there were ominous embankments and ridges of freshly-turned soil, and a scattered fringe of timbers following a cruel, undeviating furrow on the broad grazing lands of the Mision. But it was not until he had crossed the arroyo that he felt the full extent of the late improvements. A quick rumbling in the distance, a light flash of steam above the willow copse, that drifted across the field on his right, and he knew that the railroad was already in operation. Captain Carroll reined in his frightened charger, and passed his hand across his brow with a dazed sense of loss. He had been gone only four months—yet he already felt strange and forgotten.

It was with a feeling of relief that he at last turned from the high-road into the lane. Here everything was unchanged, except that the ditches were more thickly strewn with the sodden leaves of fringing oaks and sycamores. Giving his horse to a servant in the courtyard, he did not enter the patio, but, crossing the lawn, stepped upon the long verandah. The rain was dripping from its eaves and striking a minute spray from the vines that clung to its columns; his footfall awoke a hollow echo as he passed, as if the outer shell of the house were deserted; the formal

yews and hemlocks that in summer had relieved the dazzling glare of six months' sunshine had now taken gloomy possession of the garden, and the evening shadows, thickened by rain, seemed to lie in wait at every corner. The servant, who had with old-fashioned courtesy placed the keys and the "disposition" of that wing of the house at his service, said that Doña Maria would wait upon him in the salon before dinner. Knowing the difficulty of breaking the usual rigid etiquette, and trusting to the happy intervention of Maruja—though here, again, custom debarred him from asking for her—he allowed the servant to remove his wet overcoat, and followed him to the stately and solemn chamber prepared for him. The silence and gloom of the great house, so grateful and impressive in the ardent summer, began to weigh upon him under this shadow of an overcast sky. He walked to the window and gazed out on the cloister-like verandah. A melancholy willow at an angle of the stables seemed to be wringing its hands in the rising wind. He turned for relief to the dim fire that flickered like a votive taper in the vault-like hearth, and drew a chair towards it. In spite of the impatience and preoccupation of a lover, he found himself again and again recurring to the story he had just heard, until the vengeful spirit of the murdered Doctor seemed to darken and possess the house. He was striving to shake off the feeling, when his attention was attracted to stealthy footsteps in the passage. Could it be Maruja? He rose to his feet with his eye upon the door. The footsteps ceased—it remained closed. But another door, which had escaped his attention in the darkened corner, slowly swung on its hinges, and, with a stealthy step, Pereo, the mayordomo, entered the room.

Courageous and self-possessed as Captain Carroll was by nature and education, this malevolent vision and incarnation of the thought uppermost in his mind, turned him cold. He had half drawn a derringer from his breast, when his

eye fell on the grizzled locks and wrinkled face of the old man, and his hand dropped to his side. But Pereo, with the quick observation of insanity, had noticed the weapon, and rubbed his hands together with a malicious laugh.

"Good! good! good!" he whispered rapidly, in a strange bodiless voice, "'twill serve! 'twill serve! And you are a soldier too—and know how to use it! Good, it is a Providence!" He lifted his hollow eyes to heaven, and then added, "Come! come!"

Carroll stepped towards him. He was alone and in the presence of an undoubted madman—one strong enough, in spite of his years, to inflict a deadly injury, and one whom he now began to realise might have done so once before. Nevertheless, he laid his hand on the old man's arm, and, looking him calmly in the eye, said quietly, "Come? Where, Pereo? I have only just arrived."

"I know it," whispered the old man, nodding his head violently. "I was watching them, when you rode up. That is why I lost the scent; but together we can track them still—we can track them. Eh, Captain, eh! Come! Come!" and he moved slowly backward, waving his hand towards the door.

"Track whom, Pereo?" said Carroll soothingly. "Whom do you seek?"

"Whom?" said the old man, startled for a moment and passing his hand over his wrinkled forehead. "Whom? Eh! Why, the Doña Maruja and the little black cat—her maid—Faquita!"

"Yes; but why seek them? Why track them?"

"Why?" said the old man, with a sudden burst of impotent passion. "*You* ask me why! Because they are going to the rendezvous again. They are going to seek him. Do you understand—to seek *him*—the Coyote!"

Carroll smiled a faint smile of relief—"So—the Coyote!"

"Ay," said the old man in a confidential whisper; "the Coyote! But not the *big* one—you understand—the little

one. The big one is dead—dead—dead! But the little one lives yet. You shall do for *him* what I, Pereo—listen"—he glanced around the room furtively—"what I, the good old Pereo, did for the big one! Good, it is a Providence. Come!"

Of the terrible thoughts that crossed Carroll's mind at this unexpected climax one alone was uppermost. The trembling irresponsible wretch before him meditated some vague crime—and Maruja was in danger. He did not allow himself to dwell upon any other suspicion suggested by that speech; he quickly conceived a plan of action. To have rung the bell and given Pereo into the hands of the servants would have only exposed to them the lunatic's secret—if he had any—and he might either escape in his fury or relapse into useless imbecility. To humour him and follow him, and trust afterwards to his own quickness and courage to avert any calamity, seemed to be the only plan. Captain Carroll turned his clear glance on the restless eyes of Pereo, and said, without emotion, "Let us go, then, and quickly. You shall track them for me; but remember, good Pereo, you must leave the rest to me."

In spite of himself, some accidental significance in this ostentatious adjuration to lull Pereo's suspicions struck him with pain. But the old man's eyes glittered with gratified passion as he said, "Ay, good! I will keep my word. Thou shalt work thy will on the little one as I have said. Truly it is a Providence! Come!" Seeing Captain Carroll glance round for his overcoat, he seized a poncho from the wall, wrapped it round him, and grasped his hand. Carroll, who would have evaded this semblance of disguise, had no time to parley, and they turned together through the door by which Pereo had entered into a long dark passage, which seemed to be made through the outer shell of the building that flanked the park. Following his guide in the profound obscurity, perfectly conscious that any

change in his madness might be followed by a struggle in the dark, where no help could reach them, they presently came to a door that opened upon the fresh smell of rain and leaves. They were standing at the bottom of a secluded alley, between two high hedges that hid it from the end of the garden. Its grass-grown walk and untrimmed hedges showed that it was seldom used. Carroll, still keeping close to Pereo's side, felt him suddenly stop and tremble. "Look!" he said, pointing to a shadowy figure some distance before them, "look, 'tis Maruja, and alone!"

With a dexterous movement, Carroll managed to slip his arm securely through the old man's, and even to throw himself before him, as if in his eagerness to discern the figure.

"'Tis Maruja—and alone!" said Pereo, trembling. "Alone! Eh! And the Coyote is not here!" He passed his hand over his staring eyes. "So." Suddenly he turned upon Carroll. "Ah, do you not see, it is a trick! The Coyote is escaping with Faquita! Come! Nay; thou wilt not? Then will I!" With an unexpected strength born of his madness he freed his arm from Carroll and darted down the alley. The figure of Maruja, evidently alarmed at his approach, glided into the hedge, as Pereo passed swiftly by, intent only on his one wild fancy. Without a further thought of his companion or even the luckless Faquita, Carroll also plunged through the hedge, to intercept Maruja. But by that time she was already crossing the upper end of the lawn, hurrying towards the entrance to the patio. Carroll did not hesitate to follow. Keeping in view the lithe, dark, active little figure, now hidden by an intervening cluster of bushes, now fading in the gathering evening shadows, he nevertheless did not succeed in gaining upon her until she had nearly reached the patio. Here he lost ground, as, turning to the right instead of entering the courtyard, she kept her way toward the stables. He

was near enough, however, to speak. "One moment, Miss Saltonstall," he said hurriedly; "there is no danger. I am alone. But I must speak with you."

The young girl seemed only to redouble her exertions. At last she stopped before a narrow door hidden in the wall, and fumbled in her pocket for a key. That moment Carroll was upon her.

"Forgive me, Miss Saltonstall—Maruja; but you must hear me! You are safe, but I fear for your maid, Faquita!"

A little laugh followed his speech; the door yielded and opened to her vanishing figure. For an instant the lace shawl muffling her face was lifted, as the door closed and locked behind her. Carroll drew back in consternation. It was the laughing eyes and saucy face of Faquita!

CHAPTER XII.

When Captain Carroll turned from the high-road into the lane, an hour before, Maruja and Faquita had already left the house by the same secret passage and garden door that opened afterwards upon himself and Pereo. The young women had evidently changed dresses; Maruja was wearing the costume of her maid; Faquita was closely veiled and habited like her mistress; but it was characteristic that, while Faquita appeared awkward and over-dressed in her borrowed plumes, Maruja's short saya and trim bodice with the striped shawl that hid her fair head, looked infinitely more coquettish and bewitching than on its legitimate owner.

They passed hurriedly down the long alley, and at its further end turned at right angles to a small gate half hidden in the shrubbery. It opened upon a venerable vineyard, that dated back to the occupation of the padres,

but was now given over to the chance cultivation of peons and domestics. Its long, broken rows of low vines, knotted and overgrown with age, reached to the thicketed hillside of buckeye that marked the beginning of the cañada. Here Maruja parted from her maid, and, muffling the shawl more closely round her head, hastily passed between the vine rows to a ruined adobe building near the hillside. It was originally part of the refectory of the old Mision, but had been more recently used as a viñadero's cottage. As she neared it, her steps grew slower, until, reaching its door, she hesitated, with her hand timidly on the latch. The next moment she opened it gently; it was closed quickly behind her, and with a little stifled cry she found herself in the arms of Henry Guest.

It was only for an instant; the pleading of her white hands disengaged from his neck, where at first they had found themselves, and uplifted before her face, touched him more than the petitioning eyes or the sweet voiceless mouth, whose breath even was forgotten. Letting her sink into the chair from which he had just risen, he drew back a step with his hands clasped before him, and his dark half-savage eyes bent earnestly upon her. Well might he have gazed. It was no longer the conscious beauty, proud and regnant, seated before him; but a timid, frightened girl, struggling with her first deep passion.

All that was wise and gentle that she had intended to say, all that her clear intellect and experience had taught her, died upon her lips with that kiss. And all that she could do of womanly dignity and high-bred decorum was to tuck her small feet under her chair in the desperate attempt to lengthen her short skirt, and beg him not to look at her.

"I have had to change dresses with Faquita, because we were watched," she said, leaning forward in her chair and drawing the striped shawl around her shoulders. "I have had to steal out of my mother's house and through

the fields, as if I was a gipsy. If I only were a gipsy, Harry, and not"——

"And not the proudest heiress in the land," he interrupted, with something of his old bitterness. "True, I had forgot."

"But I never reminded *you* of it," she said, lifting her eyes to his. "I did not remind you of it on that day—in—in—in the conservatory, nor at the time you first spoke of—of—love to me—nor from the time I first consented to meet you here. It is *you*, Harry, who have spoken of the difference of our condition, *you* who have talked of my wealth, my family, my position—until I would gladly have changed places with Faquita as I have garments, if I had thought it would make you happier."

"Forgive me, darling!" he said, dropping on one knee before her and bending over the cold little hand he had taken, until his dark head almost rested in her lap. "Forgive me! You are too proud, Maruja, to admit, even to yourself, that you have given your heart where your hand and fortune could not follow. But others may not think so. I am proud, too, and will not have it said that I have won you before I was worthy of you."

"You have no right to be more proud than I, sir," she said, rising to her feet, with a touch of her old supreme assertion. "No—don't, Harry—please, Harry—there!" Nevertheless, she succumbed; and when she went on, it was with her head resting on his shoulder. "It's this deceit and secrecy that is so shameful, Harry. I think I could bear everything with you, if it were all known—if you came to woo me like—like—the others. Even if they abused you—if they spoke of your doubtful origin—of your poverty—of your hardships! When they aspersed you, I could fight them; when they spoke of your having no father that you could claim, I could even lie for you, I think, Harry, and say that you had; if they spoke of your poverty, I would speak of my wealth; if they talked of your hard-

ships, I should only be proud of your endurance—if I could only keep the tears from my eyes!" They were there now. He kissed them away.

"But if they threatened you? If they drove me from the house?"

"I should fly with you," she said, hiding her head in his breast.

"What if I were to ask you to fly with me now?" he said gloomily.

"Now!" she repeated, lifting her frightened eyes to his.

His face darkened with its old look of savage resentment. "Hear me, Maruja," he said, taking her hands tightly in his own. "When I forgot myself—when I was mad that day in the conservatory, the only expiation I could think of was to swear in my inmost soul that I would never take advantage of your forgiveness, that I would never tempt you to forget yourself, your friends, your family, for me, an unknown outcast. When I found you pitied me, and listened to my love—I was too weak to forego the one ray of sunshine in my wretched life—and thinking that I had a prospect before me in an idea I promised to reveal to you later, I swore never to beguile you or myself in that hope by any act that might bring you to repent it—or myself to dishonour. But I taxed myself too much, Maruja. I have asked too much of you. You are right, darling; this secrecy—this deceit—is unworthy of us! Every hour of it—blest as it has been to me—every moment—sweet as it is—blackens the purity of our only defence, makes you false and me a coward! It must end here—to-day! Maruja, darling, my precious one! God knows what may be the success of my plans. We have but one chance now. I must leave here to-day, never to return, or I must take you with me. Do not start, Maruja—but hear me out. Dare you risk all? Dare you fly with me now, to-night, to the old Padre at the ruined Mision, and let him bind us in those bonds that none dare break? We

can take Faquita with us—it is but a few miles—and we can return and throw ourselves at your mother's feet. She can only drive us forth together. Or we can fly from this cursed wealth, and all the misery it has entailed—for ever!"

She raised her head, and with her two hands on his shoulders, gazed at him with her father's searching eyes, as if to read his very soul.

"Are you mad, Harry? Think what you propose! Is this not tempting me? Think again, dearest," she said, half convulsively seizing his arm when her grasp had slipped from his shoulder.

There was a momentary silence as she stood with her eyes fixed almost wildly on his set face. But a sudden shock against the bolted door and an inarticulate outcry startled them. With an instinctive movement, Guest threw his arm round her.

"It's Pereo," she said, in a hurried whisper, but once more mistress of her strength and resolution. "He is seeking *you!* Fly at once. He is mad, Harry; a raving lunatic. He watched us the last time. He has tracked us here. He suspects you. You must not meet him. You can escape through the other door that opens upon the cañada. If you love me—fly!"

"And leave *you* exposed to his fury? Are you mad? No. Fly yourself by the other door, lock it behind you, and alarm the servants. I will open this door to him, secure him here, and then be gone. Do not fear for me. There is no danger; and if I mistake not," he added, with a strange significance, "he will hardly attack me!"

"But he may have already alarmed the household. Hark!"

There was the noise of a struggle outside the door, and then the voice of Captain Carroll, calm and collected, rose clearly for an instant. "You are quite safe, Miss Saltonstall. I think I have him secure, but perhaps you had better not open the door until assistance comes."

They gazed at each other without a word. A grim challenge played on Guest's lips. Maruja lifted her little hands deliberately, and clasped them round his defiant neck.

"Listen, darling," she said, softly and quietly, as if only the security of silence and darkness encompassed them. "You asked me just now if I would fly with you—if I would marry you without the consent of my family—against the protest of my friends—and at once! I hesitated, Harry, for I was frightened and foolish. But I say to you now that I will marry you when and where you like; for I love you, Harry, and you alone."

"Then let us go at once," he said, passionately seizing her. "We can reach the road by the cañada before assistance comes—before we are discovered. Come!"

"And you will remember in the years to come, Harry," she said, still composedly, and with her arms still around his neck, "that I never loved any but you—that I never knew what love was before, and that since I have loved you I have never thought of any other. Will you not?"

"I will; and now"——

"And now," she said, with a superb gesture towards the barrier which separated them from Carroll, "OPEN THE DOOR!"

CHAPTER XIII.

WITH a swift glance of admiration at Maruja, Guest flung open the door. The hastily summoned servants were already bearing away the madman, exhausted by his efforts. Captain Carroll alone remained there, erect and motionless, before the threshold.

At a sign from Maruja, he entered the room. In the flash of light made by the opening door, he had been perfectly conscious of her companion, but not a motion of his eye or the movement of a muscle of his face betrayed

it. The trained discipline of his youth stood him in good service, and for the moment left him master of the situation.

"I think no apology is needed for this intrusion," he said with cool composure. "Pereo seemed intent on murdering somebody or something, and I followed him here. I suppose I might have got him away more quietly, but I was afraid you might have thoughtlessly opened the door." He stopped, and added, "I see now how unfounded was the supposition."

It was a fatal addition. In the next instant, the Maruja who had been standing beside Guest, conscious-stricken and remorseful in the presence of the man she had deceived, and calmly awaiting her punishment, changed at this luckless exhibition of her own peculiar womanly weapons. The old Maruja, supreme, ready, undaunted, and passionless, returned to the fray.

"You were wrong, Captain," she said sweetly; "fortunately, Mr. Guest—whom I see you have forgotten in your absence—was with me, and I think would have felt it his duty to have protected me. But I thank you all the same, and I think even Mr. Guest will not allow his envy of your good fortune in coming so gallantly to my rescue to prevent his appreciating its full value. I am only sorry that on your return to La Mision Perdida you should have fallen into the arms of a madman before extending your hands to your friends."

Their eyes met. She saw that he hated her, and felt relieved.

"It may not have been so entirely unfortunate," he said with a coldness strongly in contrast with his gradually blazing eyes, "for I was charged with a message to you, in which this madman is supposed by some to play an important part."

"Is it a matter of business?" said Maruja lightly, yet with a sudden instinctive premonition of coming evil in the relentless tones of his voice.

"It is business, Miss Saltonstall—purely and simply business," said Carroll drily, "under whatever *other* name it may have been since presented to you."

"Perhaps you have no objection to tell it before Mr. Guest," said Maruja, with an inspiration of audacity; "it sounds so mysterious that it must be interesting. Otherwise, Captain Carroll, who abhors business, would not have undertaken it with more than his usual enthusiasm."

"As the business *does* interest Mr. Guest, or Mr. West, or whatever name he may have decided upon since I had the pleasure of meeting him," said Carroll—for the first time striking fire from the eyes of his rival—"I see no reason why I should not, even at the risk of telling you what you already know. Briefly, then, Mr. Prince charged me to advise you and your mother to avoid litigation with this gentleman, and admit his claim, as the son of Dr. West, to his share of the property."

The utter consternation and bewilderment shown in the face of Maruja convinced Carroll of his fatal error. She *had* received the addresses of this man without knowing his real position! The wild theory that had seemed to justify his resentment—that she had sold herself to Guest to possess the property—now recoiled upon him in its utter baseness. She had loved Guest for himself alone; by this base revelation he had helped to throw her into his arms.

But he did not even yet know Maruja. Turning to Guest, with flashing eyes, she said, "Is it true—are you the son of Dr. West, and"—she hesitated—"kept out of your inheritance by *us?*"

"I *am* the son of Dr. West," he said earnestly, "though I alone had the right to tell you that at the proper time and occasion. Believe me that I have given no one the right—least of all any tool of Prince—to *trade* upon it."

"Then," said Carroll fiercely, forgetting everything in his anger, "perhaps you will disclaim before this young

lady the charge made by your employer that Pereo was instigated to Dr. West's murder by her mother?"

Again he had overshot the mark. The horror and indignation depicted in Guest's face was too plainly visible to Maruja as well as himself to permit a doubt that the idea was as new as the accusation. Forgetting her bewilderment at these revelations, her wounded pride, a torturing doubt suggested by Guest's want of confidence in her—indeed, everything but the outraged feelings of her lover, she flew to his side. "Not a word," she said proudly, lifting her little hand before his darkening face. "Do not insult me by replying to such an accusation in my presence. Captain Carroll," she continued, turning towards him, "I cannot forget that you were introduced into my mother's house as an officer and a gentleman. When you return to it as such, and not as a *man of business*, you will be welcome. Until then, farewell!"

She remained standing, erect and passionless, as Carroll, with a cold salutation, stepped back and disappeared in the darkness; and then she turned, and, with tottering step and a little cry, fell upon Guest's breast. "O Harry—Harry! Why have you deceived me?"

"I thought it for the best, darling," he said, lifting her face to his. "You know now the prospect I spoke of—the hope that buoyed me up! I wanted to win you myself alone, without appealing to your sense of justice or even your sympathies! I did win you. God knows, if I had not, you would never have learned through me that a son of Dr. West had ever lived. But that was not enough. When I found that I could establish my right to my father's property, I wanted you to marry me before *you* knew it; so that it never could be said that you were influenced by anything but love for me. That was why I came here to-day. That was why I pressed you to fly with me!"

He ceased. She was fumbling with the buttons of his

waistcoat. "Harry," she said softly, "did you think of the property when—when—you kissed me in the conservatory?"

"I thought of nothing but *you*," he answered tenderly.

Suddenly she started from his embrace. "But Pereo! —Harry—tell me quick—no one—nobody can think that this poor demented old man could—that Dr. West was—that—— It's all a trick, isn't it? Harry, speak!"

He was silent for a moment, and then said gravely, "There were strange men at the fonda that night, and —my father was supposed to carry money with him. My own life was attempted at the Mision the same evening for the sake of some paltry gold pieces that I had imprudently shown. I was saved solely by the interference of one man. That man was Pereo, your mayordomo!"

She seized his hand and raised it joyfully to her lips. "Thank you for those words! And you will come to him with me at once; and he will recognise you; and we will laugh at those lies; won't we, Harry?"

He did not reply. Perhaps he was listening to a confused sound of voices rapidly approaching the cottage. Together they stepped out into the gathering night. A number of figures were coming towards them, among them Faquita, who ran a little ahead to meet her mistress.

"Oh, Doña Maruja, he has escaped!"

"Who? Not Pereo!"

"Truly. And on his horse. It was saddled and bridled in the stable all day. One knew it not. He was walking like a cat, when suddenly he parted the peons around him, like grain before a mad bull—and behold! he was on the pinto's back and away. And, alas! there is no horse that can keep up with the pinto. God grant that he may not get in the way of the r-r-railroad; that, in his very madness, he will even despise."

"My own horse is in the thicket," whispered Guest hurriedly, in Maruja's ear. "I have measured him with

the pinto before now. Give me your blessing, and I will bring him back if he be alive."

She pressed his hand and said, "Go." Before the astonished servants could identify the strange escort of their mistress, he was gone.

It was already quite dark. To any but Guest, who had made the topography of La Mision Perdida a practical study, and who had known the habitual circuit of the mayordomo in his efforts to avoid him, the search would have been hopeless. But rightly conjecturing that he would in his demented condition follow the force of habit, he spurred his horse along the high-road until he reached the lane leading to the grassy amphitheatre already described, which was once his favourite resort. Since then it had participated in the terrible transformation already wrought in the valley by the railroad. A deep cutting through one of the grassy hills had been made for the line that now crossed the lower arc of the amphitheatre.

His conjecture was justified on entering it by the appearance of a shadowy horseman in full career round the circle, and he had no difficulty in recognising Pereo. As there was no other exit than the one by which he came, the other being inaccessible by reason of the railroad track, he calmly watched him twice make the circuit of the arena, ready to ride towards him when he showed symptoms of slackening his speed.

Suddenly he became aware of some strange exercise on the part of the mysterious rider, and as he swept by on the nearer side of the circle, he saw that he was throwing a lasso! A horrible thought that he was witnessing an insane rehearsal of the murder of his father flashed across his mind.

A far-off whistle from the distant woods recalled him to his calmer senses at the same moment that it seemed also to check the evolutions of the furious rider. Guest felt confident that the wretched man could not escape him now.

It was the approaching train, whose appearance would undoubtedly frighten Pereo toward the entrance of the little valley guarded by him. The hillside was already alive with the clattering echoes of the oncoming monster, when, to his horror, he saw the madman advancing rapidly towards the cutting. He put spurs to his horse, and started in pursuit; but the train was already emerging from the narrow passage, followed by the furious rider, who had wheeled abreast of the engine, and was, for a moment or two, madly keeping up with it. Guest shouted to him, but his voice was lost in the roar of the rushing caravan.

Something seemed to fly from Pereo's hand. The next moment the train had passed; rider and horse, crushed and battered out of all life, were rolling in the ditch, while the murderer's empty saddle dangled at the end of a lasso, caught on the smoke-stack of one of the murdered man's avenging improvements!

. . . . . .

The marriage of Maruja and the son of the late Dr. West was received in the valley of San Antonio as one of the most admirably-conceived and skilfully-matured plans of that lamented genius. There were many who were ready to state that the Doctor had confided it to them years before; and it was generally accepted that the widow Saltonstall had been simply made a trustee for the benefit of the prospective young couple. Only one person, perhaps, did not entirely accept these views; it was Mr. James Prince, otherwise known as Aladdin. In later years he is said to have stated authoritatively "that the only combination in business that was uncertain—was man and woman."

A Waif of the Plains.

CHAPTER I.

A long level of dull grey that further away became a faint blue, with here and there darker patches that looked like water. At times an open space, blackened and burnt in an irregular circle, with a shred of newspaper, an old rag, or broken tin can lying in the ashes. Beyond these always a low dark line that seemed to sink into the ground at night, and rose again in the morning with the first light, but never otherwise changed its height and distance. A sense of always moving with some indefinite purpose, but of always returning at night to the same place—with the same surroundings, the same people, the same bedclothes, and the same awful black canopy dropped down from above. A chalky taste of dust on the mouth and lips, a gritty sense of earth on the fingers, and an all-pervading heat and smell of cattle.

This was "The Great Plains" as they seemed to two children from the hooded depth of an emigrant waggon above the swaying heads of toiling oxen, in the summer of 1852.

It had appeared so to them for two weeks, always the same, and always without the least sense to them of wonder or monotony. When they viewed it from the road, walking beside the waggon, there was only the team itself added to the unvarying picture. One of the waggons bore on its canvas hood the inscription, in large black letters, "Off to California!" on the other "Root Hog, or Die," but neither

of them awoke in the minds of the children the faintest idea of playfulness or jocularity. Perhaps it was difficult to connect the serious men, who occasionally walked beside them and seemed to grow more taciturn and depressed as the day wore on, with this past effusive pleasantry.

Yet the impressions of the two children differed slightly. The eldest, a boy of eleven, was apparently new to the domestic habits and customs of a life to which the younger, a girl of seven, was evidently native and familiar. The food was coarse, and less skilfully prepared than that to which he had been accustomed. There was a certain freedom and roughness in their intercourse; a simplicity that bordered almost on rudeness in their domestic arrangements, and a speech that was at times almost untranslatable to him. He slept in his clothes, wrapped up in blankets; he was conscious that in the matter of cleanliness he was left to himself to overcome the difficulties of finding water and towels. But it is doubtful if in his youthfulness it affected him more than a novelty. He ate and slept well, and found his life amusing. Only at times the rudeness of his companions, or, worse, an indifference that made him feel his dependency upon them, awoke a vague sense of some wrong that had been done to him which, while it was voiceless to all others, and even uneasily put aside by himself, was still always slumbering in his childish consciousness.

To the party he was known as an orphan put on the train at "St. Jo" by some relative of his stepmother, to be delivered to another relative at Sacramento. As his stepmother had not even taken leave of him, but had entrusted his departure to the relative with whom he had been lately living, it was considered as an act of "riddance," and accepted as such by her party, and even vaguely acquiesced in by the boy himself. What consideration had been offered for his passage he did not know; he only remembered that he had been told "to

make himself handy." This he had done cheerfully, if at times with the unskilfulness of a novice; but it was not a peculiar or a menial task in a company where all took part in manual labour, and where existence seemed to him to bear the charm of a prolonged picnic. Neither was he subjected to any difference of affection or treatment from Mrs. Silsbee, the mother of his little companion, and the wife of the leader of the train. Prematurely old, of ill-health, and harassed with cares, she had no time to waste in discriminating maternal tenderness for her daughter, but treated the children with equal and unbiassed querulousness.

The rear waggon creaked, swayed, and rolled on slowly and heavily. The hoofs of the draught oxen, occasionally striking in the dust with a dull report, sent little puffs like smoke on either side of the track. Within, the children were playing "keeping store." The little girl, as an opulent and extravagant customer, was purchasing of the boy, who sat behind a counter improvised from a nail keg and the front seat, most of the available contents of the waggon, either under their own names or an imaginary one as the moment suggested, and paying for them in the easy and liberal currency of dried beans and bits of paper. Change was given by the expeditious method of tearing the paper into smaller fragments. The diminution of stock was remedied by buying the same article over again under a different name. Nevertheless, in spite of these favourable commercial conditions, the market seemed dull.

"I can show you a fine quality of sheeting at four cents a yard, double width," said the boy, rising and leaning on his fingers on the counter as he had seen the shopmen do. "All wool, and will wash," he added with easy gravity.

"I can buy it cheaper at Jackson's," said the girl, with the intuitive duplicity of her bargaining sex.

"Very well," said the boy. "I won't play any more."

"Who cares?" said the girl indifferently.

The boy here promptly upset the counter; the rolled-up blanket, which had deceitfully represented the desirable sheeting, falling on the waggon floor. It apparently suggested a new idea to the former salesman. "I say! let's play 'damaged stock.' See, I'll tumble all the things down here right on top o' the others, and sell 'em for less than cost."

The girl looked up. The suggestion was bold, bad, and momentarily attractive. But she only said "No," apparently from habit, picked up her doll, and the boy clambered to the front of the waggon. The incomplete episode terminated at once with that perfect forgetfulness, indifference, and irresponsibility common to all young animals. If either could have flown away or bounded off finally at that moment, they would have done so with no more concern for preliminary detail than a bird or squirrel. The waggon rolled steadily on. The boy could see that one of their teamsters had climed up on the tail-board of the preceding vehicle. The other seemed to be walking in a dusty sleep.

"Kla'uns," said the girl.

The boy, without turning his head, responded "Susy."

"Wot are you going to be?" said the girl.

"Goin' to be?" repeated Clarence.

"When you is growed," exclaimed Susy.

Clarence hesitated. His settled determination had been to become a pirate, merciless yet discriminating. But reading in a bethumbed "Guide to the Plains" that morning of Fort Laramie and Kit Carson, he had decided upon the career of a "scout," as being more accessible and requiring less water. Yet, out of compassion for Susy's possible ignorance, he said neither, and responded with the American boy's modest conventionality, "President." It was safe, required no embarrassing description, and had been approved by benevolent old gentlemen with their hands on his head.

"I'm goin' to be a parson's wife," said Susy, "and keep hens, and have things giv' to me. Baby clothes, and apples, and apple sass—and melasses! and more baby clothes! and pork when you kill."

She had thrown herself at the bottom of the waggon with her back towards him and her doll in her lap. He could see the curve of her curly head, and beyond her bare dimpled knees which were raised, and over which she was trying to fold the hem of her brief skirt. "I wouldn't be a President's wife," she said presently.

"You couldn't!"

"Could if I wanted to!"

"Couldn't!"

"Could now!"

"Couldn't!"

"Why?"

Finding it difficult to explain his convictions of her ineligibility, Clarence thought it equally crushing not to give any. There was a long silence. It was very hot and dusty. The waggon scarcely seemed to move. Clarence gazed at the vignette of the track behind them formed by the hood of the rear. Presently he rose and walked past her to the tail-board. "Goin' to get down," he said, putting his legs over.

"Maw says 'No,'" said Susy.

Clarence did not reply, but dropped to the ground beside the slowly turning wheels. Without quickening his pace he could easily keep his hand on the tail-board.

"Kla'uns."

He looked up.

"Take me."

She had already clapped on her sun-bonnet, and was standing at the edge of the tail-board, her little arms extended in such perfect confidence of being caught that the boy could not resist. He caught her cleverly. They halted a moment and let the lumbering vehicle move away

from them as it swayed from side to side as if labouring in a heavy sea. They remained motionless until it had reached nearly a hundred yards, and then with a sudden half real, half assumed, but altogether delightful trepidation, ran forward and caught up with it again. This they repeated two or three times until both themselves and the excitement were exhausted, and they again plodded on hand in hand. Presently Clarence uttered a cry.

"My! Susy—look there!"

The rear waggon had once more slipped away from them a considerable distance. Between it and them, crossing its track, a most extraordinary creature had halted.

At first glance it seemed a dog—a discomfited, shameless, ownerless, outcast of streets and byways, rather than an honest estray of some drover's train. It was so gaunt, so dusty, so greasy, so slouching and so lazy! But as they looked at it more intently they saw that the greyish hair of its back had a bristly ridge, and there were great poisonous-looking dark blotches on its flanks, and that the slouch of its haunches was a peculiarity of its figure, and not the cowering of fear. As it lifted its suspicious head towards them they could see that its thin lips, too short to cover its white teeth, were curled in a perpetual sneer.

"Here, doggie!" said Clarence excitedly. "Good dog! Come."

Susy burst into a triumphant laugh. "Et taint no dog, silly; it's er coyote."

Clarence blushed. It wasn't the first time the pioneer's daughter had shown her superior knowledge. He said quickly, to hide his discomfiture, "I'll ketch him anyway, he's nothin' mor'n a ki yi."

"Ye kant, tho," said Susy, shaking her sun-bonnet. "He's faster nor a hoss!"

Nevertheless Clarence ran towards him, followed by Susy. When they had come within twenty feet of him, the lazy creature, without apparently the least effort, took two or

three limping bounds to one side and remained at the same distance as before. They repeated this onset three or four times with more or less excitement and hilarity, the animal evading them to one side, but never actually retreating before them. Finally, it occurred to them both that although they were not catching him they were not driving him away. The consequences of that thought were put into shape by Susy with round-eyed significance.

"Kla'uns, he bites."

Clarence picked up a hard sun-baked clod, and, running forward, threw it at the coyote. It was a clever shot, and struck him on his slouching haunches. He snapped and gave a short snarling yelp and vanished. Clarence returned with a victorious air to his companion. But she was gazing intently in the opposite direction, and for the first time he discovered that the coyote had been leading them half round a circle.

"Kla'uns," says Susy, with an hysterical little laugh.

"Well?"

"The waggon's gone."

Clarence started. It was true. Not only their waggon, but the whole train of oxen and teamsters had utterly disappeared, vanishing as completely as if they had been caught up in a whirlwind or engulfed in the earth. Even the low cloud of dust that usually marked their distant course by day was nowhere to be seen. The long level plain stretched before them to the setting sun, without a sign or trace of moving life or animation. That great blue crystal bowl, filled with dust and fire by day, with stars and darkness by night, which had always seemed to drop its rim round them everywhere and shut them in, seemed to them now to have been lifted to let the train pass out, and then closed down upon them for ever.

CHAPTER II.

THEIR first sensation was one of purely animal freedom!

They looked at each other with sparkling eyes and long silent breaths. But this spontaneous outburst of savage nature soon passed. Susy's little hand presently reached forward and clutched Clarence's jacket. The boy understood it, and said quickly—"They ain't gone far, and they'll stop as soon as they find us gone."

They trotted on a little faster; the sun they had followed every day and the fresh waggon-tracks being their unfailing guides; the keen cool air of the plains, taking the place of that all-pervading dust and smell of the perspiring oxen, invigorating them with its breath.

"We ain't skeered a bit, are we?" said Susy.

"What's there to be afraid of?" said Clarence scornfully. He said this none the less strongly because he suddenly remembered that they had been often left alone in the waggon for hours without being looked after, and that their absence might not be noticed until the train stopped to encamp at dusk, two hours later.

They were not running very fast, yet either they were more tired than they knew, or the air was thinner, for they both seemed to breathe quickly. Suddenly Clarence stopped. "There they are now."

He was pointing to a light cloud of dust in the far-off horizon, from which the black hulk of a waggon emerged for a moment and was lost. But even as they gazed the cloud seemed to sink like a fairy mirage to the earth again, the whole train disappeared, and only the empty stretching track returned. They did not know that this seemingly flat and level plain was really undulatory, and that the vanished train had simply dipped below their view on some further slope even as it had once before. But they knew they were

disappointed, and that disappointment revealed to them the fact that they had concealed it from each other. The girl was the first to succumb, and burst into a quick spasm of angry tears. That single act of weakness called out the boy's pride and strength. There was no longer an equality of suffering; he had become her protector; he felt himself responsible for both. Considering her no longer his equal, he was no longer frank with her.

"There's nothin' to boo-hoo for," he said, with a half-affected brusqueness. "So quit now! They'll stop in a minit and send some one back for us. Shouldn't wonder if they're doin' it now."

But Susy, with feminine discrimination detecting the hollow ring in his voice, here threw herself upon him and began to beat him violently with her little fists. "They ain't! They ain't! They ain't! You know it! How dare you?" Then, exhausted with her struggles, she suddenly threw herself flat on the dry grass, shut her eyes tightly, and clutched at the stubble.

"Get up," said the boy, with a pale, determined face that seemed to have got much older.

"You leave me be!" said Susy.

"Do you want me to go away and leave you?" asked the boy.

Susan opened one blue eye furtively in the secure depths of her sun-bonnet and gazed at his changed face.

"Ye-e-s."

He pretended to turn away, but really to look at the height of the sinking sun.

"Kla'uns!"

"Well?"

"Take me."

She was holding up her hands. He lifted her gently in his arms, dropping her head over his shoulder. "Now," he said cheerfully, "you keep a good look-out that way, and I this, and we'll soon be there."

The idea seemed to please her. After Clarence had stumbled on for a few moments, she said, "Do you see anything, Kla'uns?"

"Not yet."

"No more don't I." This equality of perception apparently satisfied her. Presently she lay more limp in his arms. She was asleep.

The sun was sinking lower; it had already touched the edge of the horizon, and was level with his dazzled and straining eyes. At times it seemed to impede his eager search and task his vision. Haze and black spots floated across the horizon, and round wafers, like duplicates of the sun, glittered back from the dull surface of the plains. Then he resolved to look no more until he had counted fifty, a hundred—but always with the same result, the return of the empty, unending plains; the disc growing redder as it neared the horizon, the fire it seemed to kindle as it sank, but nothing more!

Staggering under his burden, he tried to distract himself by fancying how the discovery of their absence would be made. He heard the listless, half-querulous discussion about the locality that regularly pervaded the nightly camp. He heard the discontented voice of Jake Silsbee as he halted beside their waggon and said, "Come, out o' that now, you two, and mighty quick about it." He heard the command harshly repeated. He saw the look of irritation on Silsbee's dusky-bearded face that followed his hurried glance into the empty waggon. He heard the query "What's gone o' them limbs now?" handed from waggon to waggon. He heard a few oaths; Mrs. Silsbee's high, rasping voice, abuse of himself, the hurried and discontented detachment of a search party, Silsbee and one of the hired men, and vociferation and blame. Blame always for himself, the elder, who might have "known better!" A little fear, perhaps, but he could not fancy either pity or commiseration. Perhaps the

thought upheld his pride; under the prospect of sympathy he might have broken down.

At last he stumbled, and stopped to keep himself from falling forward on his face. He could go no further; his breath was spent; he was dripping with perspiration; his legs were trembling under him; there was a roaring in his ears; round red discs of the sun were scattered everywhere around him like spots of blood. To the right of the trail there seemed to be a slight mound where he could rest awhile and yet keep his watchful survey of the horizon. But on reaching it he found that it was only a tangle of taller mesquite grass, into which he sank with his burden. Nevertheless, if useless as a point of vantage, it afforded a soft couch for Susy, who seemed to have fallen quite naturally into her usual afternoon siesta, and in a measure it shielded her from a cold breeze that had sprung up from the west. Utterly exhausted himself, but not daring to yield to the torpor that seemed to be creeping over him, Clarence half sat, half knelt down beside her, supporting himself with one hand, and, partly hidden in the long grass, kept his straining eyes fixed on the lonely track.

The red disc was sinking lower. It seemed to have already crumbled away a part of the distance with its eating fires. As it sank still lower, it shot out long luminous rays, diverging fan-like across the plain as if, in the boy's excited fancy, it too were searching, with parted and extended fingers, for the lost estrays. And as one long beam seemed to linger over his hiding-place, he even thought that it might serve as a guide to Silsbee and the other seekers, and was constrained to stagger to his feet, erect in its light. But it soon sank, and with it Clarence dropped back again to his crouching watch. Yet he knew that the daylight was still good for an hour, and with the withdrawal of that mystic sunset glory, objects became even more distinct and

sharply defined than at any other time. And with the merciful sheathing of that flaming sword which seemed to have waved between him and the vanished train, his eyes already felt a blessed relief.

CHAPTER III.

With the setting of the sun an ominous silence fell. He could hear the low breathing of Susy, and even fancied he could detect the beating of his own heart in that oppressive hush of all nature. For the day's march had always been accompanied by the monotonous creaking of wheels and axles, and even the quiet of the night encampment had been always more or less broken by the movement of unquiet sleepers on the waggon-beds, or the breathing of the cattle. But here there was neither sound nor motion. Susy's prattle, and even the sound of his own voice, would have broken the benumbing spell. But it was part of his growing self-denial now that he refrained from waking her even by a whisper. She would awaken soon enough to thirst and hunger, perhaps; and then what was he to do? If that looked-for help would only come now—while she still slept. For it was part of his boyish fancy that if he could deliver her asleep, and undemonstrative of fear and suffering, he would be less blameful, and she less mindful, of her trouble. If it did not come—but he would not think of that yet. If she was thirsty meantime—well, it might rain, and there was always the dew which they used to brush off the morning grass—he would take off his shirt and catch it in that, like a shipwrecked mariner. It would be funny, and make her laugh. For himself he would not laugh, he felt he was gettind very old and grown-up in this loneliness.

It was getting darker—they should be looking into the waggons now. A new doubt began to assail him. Ought he not, now that he was rested, make the most of the remaining moments of daylight, and before the glow faded from the west, when he would no longer have any bearings to guide him? But there was always the risk of waking her!—to what? The fear of being confronted again with *her* fear, and of being unable to pacify her, at last decided him to remain. But he crept softly through the grass, and in the dust of the track traced the four points of the compass, as he would still determine them by the sunset light, with a large printed W to indicate the west! This boyish contrivance particularly pleased him. If he had only a pole, a stick, or even a twig, on which to tie his handkerchief and erect it above the clump of mesquite as a signal to the searchers in case he should be overcome by fatigue or sleep, he would have been happy. But the plain was barren of brush or timber; he did not dream that this omission and the very unobtrusiveness of his hiding-place would be his salvation from a greater danger.

With the coming darkness the wind arose and swept the plain with a long-drawn sigh. This increased to a murmur, till presently the whole expanse—before sunk in awful silence—seemed to awake with vague complaints, incessant sounds, and low moanings. At times he thought he heard the holloing of distant voices, at times it seemed as a whisper in his own ear. In the silence that followed each blast he fancied he could detect the creaking of the waggon, the dull thud of the oxen's hoofs, or broken fragments of speech, blown and scattered even as he strained his ears to listen by the next gust. This tension of the ear began to confuse his brain, as his eyes had been previously dazzled by the sunlight, and a strange torpor began to steal over his faculties. Once or twice his head dropped.

He awoke with a start. A moving figure had suddenly uplifted itself between him and the horizon! It was not

twenty yards away, so clearly outlined against the still luminous sky that it seemed even nearer. A human figure, but so dishevelled, so fantastic, and yet so mean and puerile in its extravagance, that it seemed the outcome of a childish dream. It was amounted figure, but so ludicrously disproportionate to the pony it bestrode, whose slim legs were stiffly buried in the dust in a breathless halt, that it might have been a straggler from some vulgar wandering circus. A tall hat, crownless and brimless, a castaway of civilisation, surmounted by a turkey's feather, was on its head; over its shoulders hung a dirty tattered blanket that scarcely covered the two painted legs, which seemed clothed in soiled yellow hose. In one hand it held a gun; the other was bent above its eyes in eager scrutiny of some distant point beyond and east of the spot where the children lay concealed. Presently, with a dozen quick noiseless strides of the pony's legs, the apparition moved to the right, its gaze still fixed on that mysterious part of the horizon. There was no mistaking it now! The painted Hebraic face, the large curved nose, the bony cheek, the broad mouth, the shadowed eyes, the straight long matted locks: it was an Indian! Not the picturesque creature of Clarence's imagination, but still an Indian! The boy was uneasy, suspicious, antagonistic; but not afraid. He looked at the heavy animal face with the superiority of intelligence, at the half-naked figure with the conscious supremacy of dress, at the lower individuality with the contempt of a higher race. Yet a moment after, when the figure wheeled and disappeared towards the undulating west, a strange chill crept over him. Yet he did not know that in this puerile phantom and painted pigmy the awful majesty of death had passed him by.

"Mamma!"

It was Susy's voice, struggling into consciousness. Perhaps she had been instinctively conscious of the boy's sudden fears.

"Hush!"

He had just turned to the objective point of the Indian's gaze. There *was* something! A dark line was moving along with the gathering darkness. For a moment he hardly dared to voice his thoughts even to himself. It was a following train overtaking them from the rear! And from the rapidity of its movements a train with horses, hurrying forward to evening camp. He had never dreamt of help from that quarter. And this was what the Indian's keener eyes had been watching, and why he had so precipitately fled.

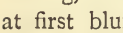
The strange train was now coming up at a round trot. It was evidently well appointed, with five or six large waggons and several outriders. In half-an-hour it would be here. Yet he restrained from waking Susy, who had fallen asleep again; his old superstition of securing her safety first being still uppermost. He took off his jacket to cover her shoulders, and rearranged her nest. Then he glanced again at the coming train. But for some unaccountable reason it had changed its direction, and instead of following the track that should have brought it to his side, it had turned off to the left! In ten minutes it would pass abreast of him a mile and a half away! If he woke Susy now he knew she would be helpless in her terror, and he could not carry her half that distance. He might rush to the train himself and return with help, but he would never leave her alone—in the darkness. Never! If she woke she would die of fright perhaps, or wander blindly and aimlessly away. No! The train would pass, and with it that hope of rescue. Something was in his throat, but he gulped it down and was quiet again, albeit he shivered in the night wind.

The train was nearly abreast of him now. He ran out of the tall grass, waving his straw hat above his head in the faint hope of attracting attention. But he did not go far, for he found, to his alarm, that when he turned back

again the clump of mesquite was scarcely distinguishable from the rest of the plain. This settled all question of his going. Even if he reached the train and returned with some one, how would he ever find her again in this desolate expanse?

He watched the train slowly pass, still mechanically—almost hopelessly—waving his hat as he ran up and down before the mesquite as if he were waving a last farewell to his departing hope. Suddenly it appeared to him that three of the outriders who were preceding the first waggon had changed their shape. They were no longer sharp, oblong, black blocks against the horizon, but had become at first blurred and indistinct, then taller and narrower, until at last they stood out like exclamation points against the sky. He continued to wave his hat, they continued to grow taller and narrower. He understood it now—the three transformed blocks were the outriders coming towards him.

This is what he had seen—



This is what he saw now—

! ! !

He ran back to Susy to see if she still slept, for his foolish desire to have her saved unconsciously was stronger than ever now that safety seemed so near. She was still sleeping, although she had moved slightly. He ran to the front again.

The outriders had apparently halted. What were they doing? Why wouldn't they come on?

Suddenly a blinding flash of light seemed to burst from one of them. Away over his head something whistled like a rushing bird, and sped off invisible. They had fired a gun; they were signalling to him, Clarence, like a grown-up man! He would have given his life at that moment to have had a gun. But he could only wave his hat frantically.

One of the figures here bore away and impetuously

darted forward again. He was coming nearer, powerful, gigantic, formidable as he loomed through the darkness. All at once he threw up his arm with a wild gesture to the others; and his voice, manly, frank, and assuring, came ringing before him.

"Hold up! Don't fire! It's no Injin—it's a child!"

In another moment he had reined up beside Clarence and leaned over him, bearded, handsome, all-encompassing and protecting.

"Hallo! What's all this? What are you doing here?"

"Lost from Mr. Silsbee's train," said Clarence, pointing to the now darkened west.

"Lost! How long?"

"About three hours. I thought they'd come back for us," said Clarence apologetically to this big kindly man.

"And you kalkilated to wait here for 'em?"

"Yes, yes—I did—till I saw you."

"Then why in thunder didn't you light out straight for us, instead of hanging round here and drawing us out?"

The boy hung his head. He knew his reasons were unchanged, but all at once they seemed very foolish and unmanly to speak out.

"Only that we were on the keen jump for Injins," continued the stranger, "we wouldn't have seen you at all, and might hev shot you when we did. What possessed you to stay here?"

The boy was still silent. "Kla'uns," said a faint, sleepy voice from the mesquite, "take me." The rifle shot had awakened Susy.

The stranger turned quickly towards the sound. Clarence started and recalled himself.

"There," he said bitterly, "you've done it now, you've wakened her! *That's* why I stayed. I couldn't carry her over there to you! I couldn't let her walk, for she'd be frightened. I wouldn't wake her up, for she'd be frightened, and I mightn't find her again. There!" He had made

up his mind to be abused, but he was reckless now that she was safe.

The men glanced at each other. "Then," said the spokesman quietly, "you didn't strike out for us on account of your sister?"

"She ain't my sister," said Clarence quickly. "She's a little girl. She's Mrs. Silsbee's little girl. We were in the waggon and got down. It's my fault. I helped her down."

The three men reined their horses closely round him, leaning forward from their saddles, with their hands on their knees, and their heads on one side. "Then," said the spokesman gravely, "you just reckoned to stay here, old man, and take your chances *with her* rather than run the risk of frightening or leaving her—though it was your one chance of life!"

"Yes," said the boy, a little weary of this feeble, grown-up repetition.

"Come here."

The boy came doggedly forward. The man pushed back the well-worn straw hat from Clarence's forehead and looked into his lowering face. With his hand still on the boy's head he turned him round to the others, and said quietly—

"Suthin' of a pup, eh?"

"You bet," they responded.

The voice was not unkindly, although the speaker had thrown his lower jaw forward as to pronounce the word "pup" with a humorous suggestion of a mastiff. Before Clarence could make up his mind if the epithet was insulting or not, the man put out his stirruped foot, and, with a gesture of invitation, said, "Jump up."

"But Susy," said Clarence, drawing back.

"Look; she's making up to Phil already."

Clarence looked. Susy had crawled out of the mesquite, and with her sun-bonnet hanging down her back, her curls

tossed around her face still flushed with sleep, and Clarence's jacket over her shoulders, was gazing up with grave satisfaction in the laughing eyes of one of the men who was, with outstretched hands, bending over her. Could he believe his senses? The terror-stricken, wilful, unmanageable Susy, whom he would have translated unconsciously to safety without this terrible ordeal of being awakened to the loss of her home and parents, at any sacrifice to himself —this ingenuous infant was absolutely throwing herself, with every appearance of forgetfulness, into the arms of the first new-comer! Yet his perception of this fact was accompanied by no sense of ingratitude. For her sake he felt relieved, and with a boyish smile of satisfaction and encouragement vaulted into the saddle before the stranger.

CHAPTER IV.

The dash forward to the train, securely held in the saddle by the arms of their deliverers, was a secret joy to the children that seemed only too quickly over. The resistless gallop of the fiery mustangs, the rush of the night wind, the gathering darkness in which the distant waggons, now halted and facing them, looked like domed huts in the horizon—all then seemed but a delightful and fitting climax to the events of the day. In the sublime forgetfulness of youth, all they had gone through had left no embarrassing record behind it; they were willing to repeat their experiences, on the morrow, confident of some equally happy end. And when Clarence, timidly reaching his hand towards the horse-hair reins lightly held by his companion, had them playfully yielded up to him by that bold and confident rider, the boy felt himself indeed a man.

But a greater surprise was in store for them. As they neared the waggons, now formed into a circle with a certain

degree of military formality, they could see that the appointments of the strange party were larger and more liberal than their own, or, indeed, anything they had ever known of the kind. Forty or fifty horses were tethered within the circle, and the camp fires were already blazing. Before one of them a large tent was erected, and through the parted flaps could be seen a table actually spread with a white cloth. Was it a school-feast, or was this their ordinary household arrangements? Clarence and Susy thought of their own dinners usually laid on bare boards beneath the sky, or under the low hood of the waggon in rainy weather, and marvelled. And when they finally halted and were lifted from their horses, and passed one waggon fitted up as a bedroom and another as a kitchen, they could only nudge each other with silent appreciation. But here again the difference already noted in the quality of the sensations of the two children was observable. Both were equally and agreeably surprised. But Susy's wonder was merely the sense of novelty and inexperience, and a slight disbelief in the actual necessity of what she saw; while Clarence, whether from some previous general experience or peculiar temperament, had the conviction that what he saw here was the usual custom, and what he had known with the Silsbees was the novelty. The feeling was attended with a slight sense of wounded pride for Susy, as if her enthusiasm had exposed her to ridicule.

The man who had carried him, and seemed to be the head of the party, had already preceded them to the tent, and presently reappeared with a lady with whom he had exchanged a dozen hurried words. They seemed to refer to him and Susy; but Clarence was too much preoccupied with the fact that the lady was pretty, that her clothes were neat and thoroughly clean, that her hair was tidy and not rumpled, and that although she wore an apron it was as clean as her gown, and even had ribbons on it, to listen to what was said. And when she ran eagerly forward, and

with a fascinating smile lifted the astonished Susy in her arms, Clarence, in his delight for his young charge, quite forgot that she had not noticed him. The bearded man, who seemed to be the lady's husband, evidently pointed out the omission, with some additions that Clarence could not catch, for after saying, with a pretty pout, "Well, why shouldn't he?" she came forward with the same dazzling smile, and laid her small and clean white hand upon his shoulder.

"And so you took good care of the dear little thing? She's such an angel, isn't she? and you must love her very much."

Clarence coloured with delight. It was true it had never occurred to him to look at Susy in the light of a celestial visitant, and I fear he was just then more struck with the fair complimenter than the compliment to his companion, but he was pleased for her sake. He was not yet old enough to be conscious of the sex's belief in its irresistible domination over mankind at all ages—that "Johnny" in his check apron would be always a hopeless conquest of "Jeannette" in her pinafore, and that he ought to have been in love with Susy.

Howbeit, the lady suddenly whisked her away to the recesses of her own waggon, to reappear later, washed, curled, and beribboned like a new doll, and Clarence was left alone with the husband and another of the party.

"Well, my boy, you haven't told me your name yet."

"Clarence, sir."

"So Susy calls you—but what else?"

"Clarence Brant."

"Any relation to Colonel Brant?" asked the second man carelessly.

"He was my father," said the boy, brightening under this faint prospect of recognition in his loneliness.

The two men glanced at each other. The leader looked at the boy curiously and said—

"Are you the son of Colonel Brant of Louisville?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy, with a dim stirring of uneasiness in his heart. "But he's dead now," he added finally.

"Ah, when did he die?" said the man quickly.

"Oh, a long time ago. I don't remember him much. I was very little," said the boy, half apologetically.

"Ah, you don't remember him?"

"No," said Clarence shortly. He was beginning to fall back upon that certain dogged repetition which in sensitive children arises from their hopeless inability to express their deeper feelings. He also had an instinctive consciousness that this want of a knowledge of his father was part of that vague wrong that had been done him. It did not help his uneasiness that he could see that one of the two men who turned away with a half laugh misunderstood or did not believe him.

"How did you come with the Silsbees?" asked the first man.

Clarence repeated mechanically, with a child's distaste of practical details, how he had lived with an aunt of St. Jo., how his stepmother had procured his passage with the Silsbees to California, where he was to meet his cousin. All this with a lack of interest and abstraction that he was miserably conscious told against him, but he was yet helpless to resist.

The first man remained thoughtful, and then glanced at Clarence's sunburnt hands. Presently his large good-humoured smile returned.

"Well, I suppose you are hungry?"

"Yes," said Clarence shyly. "But"——

"But what?"

"I should like to wash myself a little," he returned hesitatingly, thinking of the clean tent, the clean lady, and Susy's ribbons.

"Certainly," said his friend with a pleased look. "Come with me." Instead of leading Clarence to the battered tin

basin and bar of yellow soap which had formed the toilet service of the Silsbee party, he brought the boy into one of the waggons, where there was a wash-stand, a china basin, and a cake of scented soap. Standing beside Clarence, he watched him perform his ablutions with an approving air which rather embarrassed his *protégé*. Presently he said, almost abruptly—

"Do you remember your father's house at Louisville?"

"Yes, sir; but it was a long time ago."

Clarence remembered it as being very different from his home at St. Joseph's, but from some innate feeling of diffidence he would have shrunk from describing it in that way. He, however, said he thought it was a large house. Yet the modest answer only made his new friend look at him the more keenly.

"Your father was Colonel Hamilton Brant of Louisville, wasn't he?" he said half confidentially.

"Yes," said Clarence hopelessly.

"Well," said his friend cheerfully, as if dismissing an abstruse problem from his mind, "let's go to supper."

When they reached the tent again, Clarence noticed that the supper was laid only for his host and wife and the second man—who was familiarly called "Harry," but who spoke of the former always as "Mr. and Mrs. Peyton"—while the remainder of the party, a dozen men, were at the second camp-fire, and evidently enjoying themselves in a picturesque fashion. Had the boy been allowed to choose he would have joined them, partly because it seemed more "manly," and partly that he dreaded a renewal of the questioning. But here Susy, sitting bolt upright on an extemporised high stool, happily diverted his attention by pointing to the empty chair beside her.

"Kla'uns," she said suddenly, with her usual clear and appalling frankness, "they is chickens and hamanaigs and hot biksquits, and lasses, and Mister Peyton says I kin have 'em all."

Clarence, who had begun suddenly to feel that he was responsible for Susy's deportment, and was balefully conscious that she was holding her plated fork in her chubby fist by its middle, and, from his previous knowledge of her, was likely at any moment to plunge it into a dish before her, said softly—

"Hush!"

"Yes, you shall, dear," says Mrs. Peyton, with tenderly-beaming assurance to Susy, and a half-reproachful glance at the boy. "Eat what you like, darling."

"It's a fork," whispered the still uneasy Clarence, as Susy now seemed inclined to stir her bowl of milk with it.

"Tain't now, Kla'uns, it's only a split spoon," said Susy.

But Mrs. Peyton, in her rapt admiration, took small note of these irregularities, plying the child with food, forgetting her own meal, and only stopping at times to lift back the forward straying curls on Susy's shoulders. Mr. Peyton looked on gravely and contentedly. Suddenly the eyes of husband and wife met.

"She'd have been nearly as old as this, John," said Mrs. Peyton, in a faint voice.

John Peyton nodded without speaking, and turned his eyes away into the gathering darkness. The man "Harry" also looked abstractedly at his plate as if he was saying grace. Clarence wondered who "she" was, and why two little tears dropped from Mrs. Peyton's lashes into Susy's milk, and whether Susy might not violently object to it. He never knew until later that the Peytons had lost their only child, and Susy comfortably drained this mingled cup of a mother's grief and tenderness without suspicion.

"I suppose we'll come up with their train early to-morrow, if some of them don't find us to-night," said Mrs. Peyton with a long sigh and a regretful glance at Susy. "Perhaps we might travel together for a little while," she added timidly. Harry laughed, and Mr. Peyton replied gravely, "I am afraid we wouldn't travel with

them, even for company's sake; and," he added in a lower and graver voice, "it's rather odd the search party hasn't come upon us yet, though I'm keeping Pete and Hank patrolling the trail to meet them."

"It's heartless—so it is"—— said Mrs. Peyton, with sudden indignation. "It would be all very well if it was only this boy—who can take care of himself—but to be so careless of a mere baby like this, it's shameful!"

For the first time Clarence tasted the cruelty of discrimination. All the more keenly that he was beginning to worship — after his boyish fashion — this sweet-faced, clean, and tender-hearted woman. Perhaps Mr. Peyton noticed it, for he came quietly to his aid.

"Maybe they know better than we in what careful hands they had left her," he said, with a cheerful nod towards Clarence. "And, again, they may have been fooled as we were by Injin signs and left the straight road."

This suggestion instantly recalled to Clarence his vision in the mesquite. Should he dare tell them? Would they believe him, or would they laugh at him before her? He hesitated, and at last resolved to tell it privately to the husband. When the meal was ended, and he was made happy by Mrs. Peyton's laughing acceptance of his offer to help her clear the table and wash the dishes, they all gathered comfortably in front of the tent before the large camp-fire. At the other fire the rest of the party were playing cards and laughing, but Clarence no longer cared to join them. He was quite tranquil in the maternal propinquity of his hostess, albeit a little uneasy as to his reticence about the Indian.

"Kla'uns," said Susy, relieving a momentary pause, in her highest voice, "knows how to speak. Speak, Kla'uns!"

It appearing from Clarence's blushing explanation that this gift was not the ordinary faculty of speech, but a capacity to recite verse, he was politely pressed by the company for a performance.

"Speak 'em, Kla'uns—the boy what stood unto the burnin' deck and said, 'the boy, oh, where was he?'" said Susy, comfortably lying down on Mrs. Peyton's lap and contemplating her bare knees in the air. "It's 'bout a boy," she added confidently to Mrs. Peyton, "whose father wouldn't never, never stay with him on a burnin' ship, though he said 'Stay, father, stay,' ever so much."

With this clear, lucid, and perfectly satisfactory explanation of Mrs. Hemans's "Casabianca," Clarence began. Unfortunately his actual rendering of this popular school performance was more an effort of memory than anything else, and was illustrated by those wooden gestures which a Western schoolmaster had taught him. He described the flames that "roared around him," by indicating with his hand a perfect circle of which he was the axis: he adjured his father, the late Admiral Casabianca, by clasping his hands before his chin, as if wanting to be manacled in an attitude which he was miserably conscious was unlike anything to himself he had ever felt or seen before; he described that father "faint in death below," and "the flag on high," with one single motion. Yet something that the verses had kindled in his active imagination, rather perhaps than an illustration of the verses themselves, at times brightened his grey eyes, became tremulous in his youthful voice, and I fear occasionally incoherent on his lips. At times, when not conscious of his affected art, the plain and all upon it seemed to him to slip away into the night, the blazing camp-fire at his feet to wrap him in a fateful glory, and a vague devotion to something—he knew not what—so possessed him that he communicated it, and probably some of his own youthful delight in extravagant voice, to his hearers, until when he ceased, with a glowing face, he was surprised to find that the card-players had deserted their camp-fires and gathered round the tent.

CHAPTER V.

"You didn't say 'stay, father, stay,' enough, Kla'uns," said Susy critically. Then suddenly starting upright in Mrs. Peyton's lap, she continued rapidly: "I kin dance. And sing. I kin dance High Jambooree."

"What's High Jambooree, dear?" asked Mrs. Peyton.

"You'll see. Lemme down." And Susy slipped to the ground.

The dance of High Jambooree, evidently of remote mystical African origin, appeared to consist of three small skips to the right and then to the left, accompanied by the holding up of very short skirts, incessant "teetering" on the toes of small feet, the exhibition of much bare knee and stocking, and a gurgling accompaniment of childish laughter. Vehemently applauded, it left the little performer breathless, but invincible and ready for fresh conquest.

"I kin sing too," she gasped hurriedly, as if unwilling that the applause should lapse. "I kin sing: Oh dear! Klar'uns" (piteously), "*what* is it I sing?"

"'Ben Bolt,'" suggested Clarence.

"Oh, yes. 'Oh, don't you remember sweet Alers Ben Bolt?'" began Susy, in the same breath and the wrong key. "'Sweet Alers, with hair so brown, who wept with delight when you giv'd her a smile, and'"—— with knitted brows and appealing recitative, "what's er rest of it, Kla'uns?"

"'Who trembled with fear at your frown?'" prompted Clarence.

"'Who trembled with fear at my frown?'" shrilled Susy "I forget er rest. Wait! I kin sing"——

"'Praise God,'" suggested Clarence.

"Yes." Here Susy, a regular attendant in camp and prayer-meetings, was on firmer ground.

Promptly lifting her high treble, yet with a certain acquired deliberation, she began, "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow." At the end of the second line the whispering and laughing ceased. A deep voice to the right, that of the champion poker-player, suddenly rose on the swell of the third line. He was instantly followed by a dozen ringing voices, and by the time the last line was reached it was given with a full chorus, in which the dull chant of teamsters and drivers mingled with the soprano of Mrs. Peyton and Susy's childish treble. Again and again it was repeated, with forgetful eyes and abstracted faces, rising and falling with the night wind and the leap and gleam of the camp-fires, and fading again like them in the immeasurable mystery of the darkened plain.

In the deep and embarrassing silence that followed at last, the party hesitatingly broke up, Mrs. Peyton retiring with Susy after offering the child to Clarence for a perfunctory "good-night" kiss, an unusual proceeding, which somewhat astonished them both, and Clarence found himself near Mr. Peyton.

"I think," said Clarence timidly, "I saw an Injin to-day."

Mr. Peyton bent down towards him. "An Injin—where?" he asked quickly, with the same look of doubting interrogatory with which he had received Clarence's name and parentage.

The boy for a moment regretted having spoken. But with his old doggedness he particularised his statement. Fortunately, being gifted with a keen perception, he was able to describe the stranger accurately, and to impart with his description that contempt for its subject which he had felt, and which to his frontier auditor established its truthfulness. Peyton turned abruptly away, but presently returned with Harry and another man.

"You are sure of this?" said Peyton, half encouragingly.

"Yes, sir."

"As sure as you are that your father is Colonel Brant and is dead?" said Harry, with a light laugh.

Tears sprang into the boy's lowering eyes. "I don't lie," he said doggedly.

"I believe you, Clarence," said Peyton quietly. "But why didn't you say it before?"

"I didn't like to say it before Susy and—her!" stammered the boy.

"Her?"

"Yes—sir—Mrs. Peyton"—— said Clarence blushingly.

"Oh," said Harry sarcastically, "how blessed polite we are!"

"That'll do. Let up on him, will you," said Peyton roughly, to his subordinate; "the boy knows what he's about. But," he continued, addressing Clarence, "how was it the Injin didn't see you?"

"I was very still on account of not waking Susy," said Clarence, "and"—— He hesitated.

"And what?"

"He seemed more keen watching what *you* were doing," said the boy boldly.

"That's so," broke in the second man, who happened to be experienced; "and as he was to wind'ard o' the boy he was off *his* scent and bearings. He was one of their rear scouts; the rest o' them's ahead crossing our track to cut us off. Ye didn't see anything else?"

"I saw a coyote first," said Clarence, greatly encouraged.

"Hold on!" said the expert, as Harry turned away with a sneer. "That's a sign, too. Wolf don't go where wolf hez been, and coyote don't foller Injins—there's no pickins! How long afore did you see the coyote?"

"Just after we left the waggon," said Clarence.

"That's it," said the man thoughtfully. "He was driven on ahead, or hanging on their flanks. These Injins are betwixt us and that ar train, or following it."

Peyton made a hurried gesture of warning, as if reminding

the speaker of Clarence's presence—a gesture which the boy noticed and wondered at. Then the conversation of the three men took a lower tone, although Clarence as distinctly heard the concluding opinion of the expert.

"It ain't no good now, Mr. Peyton, and you'd be only exposing yourself on their ground by breakin' camp agin to-night. And you don't know that it ain't *us* they're watchin'. You see, if we hadn't turned off the straight road when we got that first scare from these yer lost children, we might hev gone on and walked plump into some cursed trap of those devils. To my mind, we're just in nigger luck, and with a good watch and my patrol we're all right to be fixed where we be till daylight."

Mr. Peyton presently turned away, taking Clarence with him. "As we'll be up early and on the track of your train to-morrow, my boy, you had better turn in now. I've put you up in my waggon, and as I expect to be in the saddle most of the night, I reckon I won't trouble you much." He led the way to a second waggon—drawn up beside the one where Susy and Mrs. Peyton had retired—which Clarence was surprised to find fitted with a writing-table and desk, a chair, and even a book shelf containing some volumes. A long locker, fitted like a lounge, had been made up as a couch for him, with the unwonted luxury of clean white sheets and pillow-cases. A soft matting covered the floor of the heavy waggon bed, which, Mr. Peyton explained, was hung on centre springs to prevent jarring. The sides and roof of the vehicle were of lightly-panelled wood, instead of the usual hooked canvas frame of the ordinary emigrant waggon, and fitted with a glazed door and movable window for light and air. Clarence wondered why the big, powerful man, who seemed at home on horseback, should ever care to sit in this office like a merchant or a lawyer; and if this train sold things to the other trains, or took goods, like the pedlars, to towns on the route—but there seemed to be nothing to sell,

and the other waggons were filled with only the goods required by the party. He would have liked to ask Mr. Peyton who *he* was, and have questioned *him* as freely as he himself had been questioned. But as the average adult man never takes into consideration the injustice of denying to the natural and even necessary curiosity of childhood that questioning which he himself is so apt to assume without right, and almost always without delicacy, Clarence had no recourse. Yet the boy, like all children, was conscious that if he had been afterwards questioned about *this* inexplicable experience, he would have been blamed for his ignorance concerning it. Left to himself presently, and ensconced between the sheets, he lay for some moments staring about him. The unwonted comfort of his couch, so different from the stuffy blanket in the hard waggon bed which he had shared with one of the teamsters, and the novelty, order, and cleanliness of his surroundings, while they were grateful to his instincts, began in some vague way to depress him. To his loyal nature it seemed a tacit infidelity to his former rough companions to be lying here; he had a dim idea that he had lost that independence which equal discomfort and equal pleasure among them had given him. There seemed a sense of servitude in accepting this luxury which was not his. This set him endeavouring to remember something of his father's house, of the large rooms, draughty staircases, and far-off ceilings, and the cold formality of a life that seemed made up of strange faces; some stranger—his parents; some kinder—the servants; particularly the black nurse who had him in charge. Why did Mr. Peyton ask him about it? Why, if it were so important to strangers, had not his mother told him more of it? And why was she not like this good woman with the gentle voice who was so kind to—to Susy? And what did they mean by making *him* so miserable? Something rose in his throat, but with an effort he choked it back, and, creeping from the lounge, went softly to the

window, opened it to see if it "would work," and looked out. The shrouded camp-fires, the stars that glittered but gave no light, the dim moving bulk of a patrol beyond the circle, all seemed to intensify the darkness, and changed the current of his thoughts. He remembered what Mr. Peyton had said of him when they first met. "Suthin of a pup, ain't he?" Surely that meant something that was not bad! He crept back to the couch again.

Lying there, still awake, he reflected that he wouldn't be a scout when he grew up, but would be something like Mr. Peyton, and have a train like this, and invite the Silsbees and Susy to accompany him. For this purpose he and Susy, early to-morrow morning, would get permission to come in here and play at that game. This would familiarise him with the details, so that he would be able at any time to take charge of it. He was already an authority on the subject of Indians! He had once been fired at—as an Indian. He would always carry a rifle like that hanging from the hooks at the end of the waggon before him, and would eventually slay many Indians and keep an account of them in a big book like that on the desk. Susy would help him, having grown up a lady, and they would both together issue provisions and rations from the door of the waggon to the gathered crowds. He would be known as the "White Chief," his Indian name being "Suthin of a pup." He would have a circus van attached to the train, in which he would occasionally perform. He would also have artillery for protection. There would be a terrific engagement, and he would rush into the waggon, heated and blackened with gunpowder, and Susy would put down an account of it in a book, and Mrs. Peyton—for she would be there in some vague capacity—would say, "Really, now, I don't see but what we were very lucky in having such a boy as Clarence with us. I begin to understand him better." And Harry, who, for purposes of vague poetical retaliation, would also drop in at that moment, would mutter and say,

"He is certainly the son of Colonel Brant; dear me!" and apologise. And his mother would come in also, in her coldest and most indifferent manner, in a white ball dress, and start and say, "Good gracious, how that boy has grown! I am sorry I did not see more of him when he was young." Yet even in the midst of this came a confusing numbness, and then the side of the waggon seemed to melt away, and he drifted out again alone into the empty desolate plain from which even the sleeping Susy had vanished, and he was left deserted and forgotten. Then all was quiet in the waggon, and only the night wind moving round it. But lo! the lashes of the sleeping White Chief—the dauntless leader, the ruthless destroyer of Indians—were wet with glittering tears!

Yet it seemed only a moment afterwards that he awoke with a faint consciousness of some arrested motion. To his utter consternation, the sun, three hours high, was shining in the waggon, already hot and stifling in its beams. There was the familiar smell and taste of the dirty road in the air about him. There was a faint creeking of boards and springs, a slight oscillation, and beyond the audible rattle of harness as if the train had been under way, the waggon moving, and then there had been a sudden halt. They had probably come up with the Silsbee train; in a few moments the change would be effected and all of his strange experience would be over. He must get up now. Yet, with the morning laziness of the healthy young animal, he curled up a moment longer in his luxurious couch.

How quiet it was! There were far-off voices, but they seemed suppressed and hurried. Through the window he saw one of the teamsters run rapidly past him with a strange, breathless, preoccupied face, halt a moment at one of the following waggons, and then run back again to the front. Then two of the voices came nearer, with the dull beating of hoofs in the dust.

"Rout out the boy and ask him," said a half-suppressed,

impatient voice, which Clarence at once recognised as the man Harry's.

"Hold on till Peyton comes up," said the second voice, in a low tone; "leave it to him."

"Better find out what they were like, at once," grumbled Harry.

"Wait—stand back," said Peyton's voice, joining the others; "*I'll* ask him."

Clarence looked wonderingly at the door. It opened on Mr. Peyton, dusty and dismounted, with a strange, abstracted look in his face.

"How many waggons are in your train, Clarence?"

"Three, sir."

"Any marks on them?"

"Yes, sir," said Clarence eagerly; "'Off to California,' and 'Root, Hog, or Die.'"

Mr. Peyton's eye seemed to leap up and hold Clarence's with a sudden, strange significance, and then looked down.

"How many were you in all?" he continued.

"Five, and there was Mrs. Silsbee."

"No other woman?"

"No."

"Get up and dress yourself," he said gravely, "and wait here till I come back. Keep cool and have your wits about you." He dropped his voice slightly. "Perhaps something's happened that you'll have to show yourself a little man again for, Clarence!"

The door closed, and the boy heard the same muffled hoofs and voices die away towards the front. He began to dress himself mechanically, almost vacantly, yet conscious always of a vague undercurrent of thrilling excitement. When he had finished he waited almost breathlessly, feeling the same beating of his heart that he had felt when he was following the vanished train the day before. At last he could stand the suspense no longer, and opened the door. Everything was still in the motionless caravan, except—it

struck him oddly even then—the unconcerned prattling voice of Susy from one of the nearer waggons. Perhaps a sudden feeling that this was something that concerned *her*, perhaps an irresistible impulse overcame him, but the next moment he had leaped to the ground, faced about, and was running feverishly to the front.

The first thing that met his eyes was the helpless and desolate bulk of one of the Silsbee waggons a hundred rods away, bereft of oxen and pole, standing alone and motionless against the dazzling sky! Near it was the broken frame of another waggon, its fore-wheels and axles gone, pitched forward on its knees like an ox under the butcher's sledge. Not far away there were the burnt and blackened ruins of a third, around which the whole party on foot and horseback seemed to be gathered. As the boy ran violently on, the group opened to make way for two men carrying some helpless but awful object between them. A terrible instinct made Clarence swerve from it in his headlong course, but he was at the same moment discovered by the others, and a cry arose of "Go back!" "Stop!" "Keep him back." Heeding it no more than the wind that whistled by him, Clarence made directly for the foremost waggon—the one in which he and Susy had played. A powerful hand caught his shoulder; it was Mr. Peyton's.

"Mrs. Silsbee's waggon," said the boy, with white lips, pointing to it. "Where is she?"

"She's missing," said Peyton, "and one other—the rest are dead."

"She must be there," said the boy, struggling, and pointing to the waggon, "let me go."

"Clarence," said Peyton sternly, accenting his grasp upon the boy's arm, "be a man! Look around you. Try and tell us who these are."

There seemed to be one or two heaps of old clothes lying on the ground, and further on, where the men at a command from Peyton had laid down their burden, another. In those

ragged dusty heaps of clothes, from which all the majesty of life seemed to have been ruthlessly stamped out, only what was ignoble and grotesque appeared to be left. There was nothing terrible in this! The boy moved slowly towards them; and, incredible even to himself, the overpowering fear of them that a moment before had overcome him left him as suddenly. He walked from the one to the other, recognising them by certain marks and signs, and mentioning name after name. The groups gazed at him curiously; he was conscious that he scarcely understood himself, still less the same quiet purpose that now made him turn towards the furthest waggon.

"There's nothing there," said Peyton; "we've searched it." But the boy, without replying, continued his way, and the crowd followed him.

The deserted waggon, more rude, disorderly, and slovenly than it had ever seemed to him before, was now heaped and tumbled with broken bones, cans, scattered provisions, pots, pans, blankets, and clothing in the foul confusion of a dust-heap. But in this heterogeneous mingling the boy's quick eye caught sight of a draggled edge of calico.

"That's Mrs. Silsbee's dress," he cried, and leapt into the waggon.

At first the men stared at each other, but an instant later a dozen hands were helping him, nervously digging and clearing away the rubbish. Then one man uttered a sudden cry, and fell back with frantic but furious eyes uplifted against the pitiless, smiling sky above him.

"Great God! Look here!"

It was the yellowish, waxen face of Mrs. Silsbee that had been uncovered. But to the fancy of the boy it had changed; the old familiar lines of worry, care, and querulousness had given way to a look of remote peace and statue-like repose. He had often vexed her in her aggressive life; he was touched with remorse at her cold, passionless apathy now, and pressed timidly forward.

Even as he did so, the man, with a quick but warning gesture, hurriedly threw his handkerchief over the matted locks, as if to shut out something awful from his view. Clarence felt himself drawn back; but not before the white lips of a bystander had whispered a single word—

"Scalped, too! by God!"

CHAPTER VI.

THEN followed days and weeks that seemed to Clarence as a dream. At first an interval of hushed and awed restraint, when he and Susy were kept apart—a strange and artificial interest taken little note of by him, but afterwards remembered when others had forgotten it; the burial of Mrs. Silsbee beneath a cairn of stones, with some ceremonies that, simple though they were, seemed to usurp the sacred rights of grief from him and Susy, and leave them cold and frightened; days of frequent and incoherent childish outbursts from Susy—growing fainter and rarer as time went on, until they ceased, he knew not when; the haunting by night of that morning vision of the three or four heaps of ragged clothes upon the ground, and a half regret that he had not examined them more closely; a recollection of the awful loneliness and desolation of the broken and abandoned waggon left behind on its knees as if praying mutely when the train went on and left it; the trundling behind of the fateful waggon in which Mrs. Silsbee's body had been found—superstitiously shunned by every one—and when at last turned over to the authorities at an outpost garrison, seeming to drop the last link from the dragging chain of the past. The revelation to the children of a new experience in that brief glimpse of the frontier garrison; the handsome officer in uniform and belted sword—an heroic, vengeful figure to be admired and imitated

FEESE LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY

hereafter; the sudden importance and respect given to Susy and himself as "survivors;" the sympathetic questioning and kindly exaggerations of their experiences—quickly accepted by Susy—all these, looking back upon them afterwards, seemed to have passed in a dream.

No less strange and visionary to them seemed the real transitions they noted from the moving train. How one morning they missed the changeless, motionless, low dark line along the horizon, and before noon found themselves among rocks and trees and a swiftly-rushing river. How there suddenly appeared beside them a few days later a great grey cloud-covered ridge of mountains that they were convinced was that same dark line that they had seen so often. How the men laughed at them, and said that for the last three days they had been *crossing* that dark line, and that it was *higher* than the great grey-clouded range before them, which it had always hidden from their view. How Susy firmly believed that these changes took place in her sleep, when she always "kinder felt they were crawlin' up," and how Clarence, in the happy depreciation of extreme youth, expressed his conviction that they "weren't a bit high after all." How the weather became cold, though it was already summer, and at night the camp-fire was a necessity, and there was a stove in the tent with Susy; and yet how all this faded away, and they were again upon a dazzling, burnt, and sun-dried plain. But always as in a dream!

More real were the persons who composed the party—whom they seemed to have always known—and who, in the innocent caprice of children, had become to them more actual than the dead had ever been. There was Mr. Peyton, who, they now knew, owned the train, and who was so rich that he "needn't go to California if he didn't want to, and was going to buy a great deal of it if he liked it," and who was also a lawyer and "policeman"—which was Susy's rendering of "politician"—and was

called "Squire" and Judge at the frontier outpost, and could order anybody to be "took up if he wanted to," and who knew everybody by their Christian names; and Mrs. Peyton, who had been delicate, and was ordered by the doctor to live in the open air for six months, and "never go into a house or a town agin," and who was going to adopt Susy as soon as her husband could arrange with Susy's relatives and draw up the papers! How "Harry" was Henry Benham, Mrs. Peyton's brother, and a kind of partner of Mr. Peyton. And how the scout's name was Gus Gildersleeve, or the "White Crow;" and how, through his recognised intrepidity, an attack upon their train was no doubt averted. Then there was "Bill," the stockherder, and "Texas Jim," the *vaquero*—the latter marvellous and unprecedented in horsemanship. Such were their companions, as appeared through the gossip of the train and their own inexperienced consciousness. To them they were all astounding and important personages. But, either from boyish curiosity or some sense of being misunderstood, Clarence was more attracted by the two individuals of the party who were least kind to him—namely, Mrs. Peyton and her brother Harry. I fear that, after the fashion of most children, and some grown-up people, he thought less of the steady kindness of Mr. Peyton and the others than of the rare tolerance of Harry or the polite concessions of his sister. Miserably conscious of this at times, he quite convinced himself that if he could only win a word of approbation from Harry, or a smile from Mrs. Peyton, he would afterwards revenge himself by "running away." Whether he would or not I cannot say. I am writing of a foolish, growing, impressionable boy of eleven, of whose sentiments nothing could be safely predicted but uncertainty.

It was at this time that he became fascinated by another member of the party, whose position had been too humble and unimportant to be included in the group already noted. Of the same appearance as the other teamsters in size,

habits, and apparel, he had not at first exhibited to Clarence any claim to sympathy. But it appeared that he was actually a youth of only sixteen—a hopeless incorrigible of St. Joseph, whose parents had prevailed on Peyton to allow him to join the party by way of removing him from evil associations and as a method of reform. Of this Clarence was at first ignorant, not from any want of frankness on the part of the youth, for that ingenious young gentleman later informed him that he had killed three men in St. Louis, two in St. Jo., and that the officers of justice were after him. But it was evident that to precocious habits of drinking, smoking, chewing, and card-playing this overgrown youth added a strong tendency to exaggeration of statement. Indeed, he was known as "Lying Jim Hooker," and his various qualities presented a problem to Clarence that was attractive and inspiring, doubtful, but always fascinating. With the hoarse voice of early wickedness and a contempt for ordinary courtesy, he had a round, perfectly good-humoured face, and a disposition that, when not called upon to act up to his self-imposed *rôle* of reckless wickedness, was not unkindly.

It was only a few days after the massacre, and while the children were still wrapped in the gloomy interest and frightened reticence which followed it, that "Jim Hooker" first characteristically flashed upon Clarence's perceptions. Hanging half on and half off the saddle of an Indian pony, the lank Jim suddenly made his appearance, dashing violently up and down the track and around the waggon in which Clarence was sitting, tugging desperately at the reins, with every indication of being furiously run away with, and retaining his seat only with the most dauntless courage and skill. Round and round they went, the helpless rider at times hanging by a single stirrup near the ground, and again recovering himself by—as it seemed to Clarence — almost superhuman effort. Clarence sat open-mouthed with anxiety and excitement, and yet a few

of the other teamsters laughed. Then the voice of Mr. Peyton, from the window of his car, said quietly—

"There, that will do, Jim. Quit it!"

The furious horse and rider instantly disappeared. A few moments after, the bewildered Clarence saw the redoubtable horseman trotting along quietly in the dust of the rear on the same fiery steed, who in that prosaic light bore an astounding resemblance to an ordinary team horse. Later in the day he sought an explanation from the rider.

"You see," answered Jim gloomily, "thar ain't a galoot in this yer crowd ez knows jist *what's* in that hoss! And them ez suspecks daren't say! It wouldn't do for to hev it let out that the Judge hez a Morgan-Mexican plug that's killed two men afore he got him, and is bound to kill another afore he gets through! Why, ony the week afore we kem up to you that thar hoss bolted with me at camping! Bucked and throwd me, but I kept my holt o' the stirrups with my foot—so! Dragged me a matter of two miles, head down, and me keepin' away rocks with my hand —so!"

"Why didn't you loose your foot and let go?" asked Clarence breathlessly.

"*You* might," said Jim, with deep scorn; "that ain't *my* style. I just laid low till we kem to a steep-pitched hill, and goin' down, when the hoss was, so to speak, kinder *below* me, I just turned a hand spring so, and that landed me onter his back again."

This action, though vividly illustrated by Jim's throwing his hands down like feet beneath him and indicating the parabola of a spring in the air, proving altogether too much for Clarence's mind to grasp, he timidly turned to a less difficult detail.

"What made the horse bolt first, Mr. Hooker?"

"Smelt Injins!" said Jim, carelessly expectorating tobacco-juice in a curving jet from the side of his mouth

—a singularly fascinating accomplishment, peculiarly his own. "'n likely *your* Injins."

"But," argued Clarence hesitatingly, "you said it was a week before—and"——

"Er Mexican plug can smell Injins fifty, yes, a hundred miles away," said Jim, with scornful deliberation; "'n if Judge Peyton had took my advice, and hadn't been so mighty feared about the character of his hoss gettin' out, he'd hev played roots on them Injins afore they tetched ye. But," he added, with gloomy dejection, "thar ain't no sand in this yer crowd, thar ain't no vim; thar ain't nothin'; and thar kant be ez long ez thar's women and babies, and women and baby fixins mixed up with it. I'd hev cut the whole blamed gang ef et weren't for one or two things," he added darkly.

Clarence, impressed by Jim's mysterious manner, for the moment forgot his contemptuous allusion to Mr. Peyton, and the evident implication of Susy and himself, and asked hurriedly, "What things?"

Jim, as if forgetful of the boy's presence in his fitful mood, abstractedly half drew a glittering bowie-knife from his boot-leg, and then slowly put it back again. "Thar's one or two old scores," he continued, in a low voice, although no one was in hearing distance of them; "one or two private accounts," he went on tragically, averting his eyes as if watched by some one, "that hev to be wiped out with blood afore *I* leave. Thar's one or two men *too many* alive and breathin' in this yer crowd. Mebbee it's Gus Gildersleeve; mebbee it's Harry Benham; mebbee," he added, with dark, yet noble disinterestedness, "it's *me*."

"Oh, no," said Clarence, with polite deprecation.

Far from placating the gloomy Jim, this seemed only to awaken his suspicions. "Mebbee," he said, dancing suddenly away from Clarence, "mebbee you think I'm lyin'. Mebbee you think because you're Colonel Brant's son yer kin run *me* with this yer train. Mebbee," he continued,

dancing violently back again, "ye kalkilate because ye run off 'n stampeded a baby, ye kin tote me round too, sonny. Mebbee," he went on, executing a double shuffle in the dust, and alternately striking his hands on the sides of his boots, "mebbee you're spyin' round and reportin' to the Judge."

Firmly convinced that Jim was working himself up by an Indian war-dance to some desperate assault on himself, but resenting the last unjust accusation, Clarence had recourse to one of his old dogged silences. Happily, at this moment, an authoritative voice called out, "Now then, you Jim Hooker!" and the desperate Hooker, as usual, vanished instantly. Nevertheless, he appeared an hour or two later beside the waggon in which Susy and Clarence were seated with an expression of satiated vengeance and remorseful bloodguiltiness in his face, and his hair combed Indian fashion over his eyes. As he generously contented himself with only passing a gloomy and disparaging criticism on the game of cards that the children were playing, it struck Clarence for the first time that a great deal of his real wickedness resided in his hair. This set him to thinking that it was strange that Mr. Peyton did not try to reform him with a pair of scissors, but not until Clarence himself had for at least four days attempted to imitate Jim by combing his own hair in that fashion.

A few days later Jim again casually favoured him with a confidential interview. Clarence had been allowed to bestride one of the team-leaders postillion-wise, and was correspondingly elevated when Jim joined him on the Mexican plug, which appeared—no doubt a part of its wicked art—heavily docile, and even slightly lame.

"How much," said Jim, in a tone of gloomy confidence, "how much did you reckon to make by stealin' that gal-baby, sonny?"

"Nothing," replied Clarence, with a smile. Perhaps it was an evidence of the marked influence that Jim was

beginning to exert over him that he already did not attempt to resent this fascinating implication of grown-up guilt.

"It orter bin a good job if it warn't revenge," continued Jim moodily.

"No, it wasn't revenge," said Clarence hurriedly.

"Then ye kalkilated ter get er hundred dollars reward ef the old man and old woman hadn't bin skelped afore ye got up to 'em?" said Jim. "That's your blamed dod-gasted luck, eh! Enyhow, you'll make Mrs. Peyton plank down suthin' if she adopts the babby. Look yer, young feller," he said, starting suddenly and throwing his face forward, glaring fiendishly through his matted sidelocks, "d'ye meanter tell me it wasn't a plant—a skin game—the hull thing?"

"A what?" said Clarence.

"D'ye mean to say"—it was wonderful how gratuitously husky his voice became at this moment—"d'ye mean ter tell *me* ye didn't set on them Injins to wipe out the Silsbees, so that ye could hev an out-an-out gal *orfen* on hand fer Mrs. Peyton to adopt—eh?"

But here Clarence was forced to protest, and strongly, although Jim contemptuously ignored it. "Don't lie ter me," he repeated mysteriously; "I'm fly. I'm dark, young fel. We're cahoots in this thing?" and with this artful suggestion of being in possession of Clarence's guilty secret, he departed in time to elude the usual objurgation of his superior, "Phil," the head teamster.

Nor was his baleful fascination exercised entirely on Clarence. In spite of Mrs. Peyton's jealously affectionate care, Clarence's frequent companionship, and the little circle of admiring courtiers that always surrounded Susy, it became evident that this small Eve had been secretly approached and tempted by the satanic Jim. She was found one day to have a few heron's feathers in her possession with which she adorned her curls, and at another

time was discovered to have rubbed her face and arms with yellow and red ochre, confessedly the free gift of Jim Hooker. It was to Clarence alone that she admitted the significance and purport of these offerings. "Jim gived 'em to me," she said, "and Jim's a kind of Injin hisself that won't hurt me, and when bad Injins come they'll think I'm his Injin baby and run away. And Jim said if I'd just told the Injins when they came to kill papa and mamma that I b'longed to him they'd hev runned away."

"But," said the practical Clarence, "you could not; you know you were with Mrs. Peyton all the time."

"Kla'uns," said Susy, shaking her head and fixing her round blue eyes with calm mendacity on the boy, "don't you tell me. *I was there!*"

Clarence started back and nearly fell over the waggon in hopeless dismay at this dreadful revelation of Susy's powers of exaggeration. "But," he gasped, "you know, Susy, you and me left before"——

"Kla'uns," said Susy calmly, making a little pleat in the skirt of her dress with her small thumb and fingers, "don't you talk to me. I was there. I'se a *seriver!* The men at the fort said so! The *serivers* is allus, allus there, and allus, allus knows everythin'."

Clarence was too dumbfounded to reply. He had a vague recollection of having noticed before that Susy was very much fascinated by the reputation given to her at Fort Ridge as a "survivor," and was trying in an infantile way to live up to it. This the wicked Jim had evidently encouraged. For a day or two Clarence felt a little afraid of her, and more lonely than ever.

It was in this state, and while he was doggedly conscious that his association with Jim did not prepossess Mrs. Peyton or her brother in his favour, and that the former even believed him responsible for Susy's unhallowed acquaintance with Jim, that he drifted into one of those

youthful escapades on which elders are apt to sit in severe but not always considerate judgment. Believing, like many other children, that nobody cared particularly for him, except to *restrain* him; discovering, as children do, much sooner than we complacently imagine, that love and preference have no logical connection with desert or character, Clarence became boyishly reckless. But when one day it was rumoured that a herd of buffalo was in the vicinity, and that the train would be delayed the next morning in order that a hunt might be organised by Gildersleeve, Benham, and a few others, Clarence listened willingly to Jim's proposition that they should secretly follow it.

To effect their unhallowed purpose required boldness and duplicity. It was arranged that shortly after the departure of the hunting-party Clarence should ask permission to mount and exercise one of the team horses—a favour that had been frequently granted him. That in the outskirts of the camp he should pretend that the horse ran away with him, and Jim would start in pursuit. The absence of the shooting-party with so large a contingent of horses and men would preclude any further detachment from the camp to assist them. Once clear, they would follow the track of the hunters, and, if discovered by them, would offer the same excuse, with the addition that they had lost their way to the camp. The plan was successful. The details were carried out with almost too perfect effect; as it appeared that Jim, in order to give dramatic intensity to the fractiousness of Clarence's horse, had inserted a thorn-apple under the neck of his saddle, which Clarence only discovered in time to prevent himself from being unseated. Urged forward by ostentatious "Whoas!" and surreptitious cuts in the rear from Jim, pursuer and pursued presently found themselves safely beyond the half-dry stream and fringe of alder-bushes that skirted the camp. They were not followed. Whether the teamsters suspected and winked at this design or believing that the boys could take care of

themselves, and ran no risk of being lost in the proximity of the hunting-party, there was no general alarm.

Thus reassured, and having a general idea of the direction of the hunt, the boys pushed hilariously forward. Before them opened a vast expanse of bottom-land, slightly sloping on the right to a distant half-filled lagoon formed by the main river overflow, on whose tributary they had encamped. The lagoon was partly hidden by straggling timber and "brush," and beyond that again stretched the unlimitable plains—the pasture of their mighty game. Hither Jim hoarsely informed his companion the buffaloes came to water. A few rods further on, he started dramatically, and alighting, proceeded to slowly examine the round. It seemed to be scattered over with half-circular patches, which he pointed out mysteriously as "buffalo chip." To Clarence's inexperienced perception the plain bore a singular resemblance to the surface of an ordinary unromantic cattle pasture that somewhat chilled his heroic fancy. However, the two companions halted and professionally examined their arms and equipments.

These, I grieve to say, though varied, were scarcely full or satisfactory. The necessities of their flight had restricted Jim to an old double-barrelled fowling-piece, which he usually carried slung across his shoulders; an old-fashioned "six-shooter"—whose barrels revolved occasionally and unexpectedly—known as "Allen's Pepper Box," on account of its culinary resemblance, and a bowie-knife! Clarence carried an Indian bow and arrow with which he had been exercising, and a hatchet which he had concealed under the flanks of his saddle. To this Jim generously added the six-shooter, taking the hatchet in exchange—a transfer that at first delighted Clarence, until, seeing the warlike and picturesque effect of the hatchet in Jim's belt, he regretted the transfer. The gun, Jim meantime explained, "extry charged," "chuck up" to the middle, with slugs and revolver bullets, could only be fired by himself, and even

then, he darkly added, not without danger. This poverty of equipment was, however, compensated by the opposite statements from Jim of the extraordinary results obtained by these simple weapons from "fellers I knew." How *he* himself had once brought down a "bull" by a bold shot with a revolver through its open bellowing mouth that pierced its "innards." How a friend of his—an intimate in fact—now in jail at Louisville for killing a sheriff's deputy—had once found himself alone and dismounted, with a simple clasp knife and a lariat, among a herd of buffaloes; how, leaping calmly upon the shaggy shoulders of the biggest bull, he lashed himself with the lariat firmly to his horns, goading it onward with his clasp-knife, and subsisting for days upon the flesh cut from its living body, until, abandoned by its fellows, and exhausted by loss of blood, it finally succumbed to its victor at the very outskirts of the camp to which he had artfully driven it! It must be confessed that this recital somewhat took away Clarence's breath, and he would have liked to ask a few questions. But they were alone on the prairie, they were linked by a common transgression; the glorious sun was coming up victoriously, the pure, crisp air was intoxicating their nerves —in the bright forecast of youth everything *was* possible!

The surface of the bottom-land that they were crossing was here and there broken up by fissures and "pot holes," and some circumspection in their progress became necessary. In one of these halts, Clarence was struck by a dull, monotonous jarring, that sounded like the heavy, regular fall of water over a dam. Each time that they slackened their pace the sound would become more audible, and was at last accompanied by that slight but unmistakable tremor of the earth that betrayed the vicinity of a waterfall. Hesitating over this phenomenon, which seemed to imply that their topography was wrong and that they had blundered from the track, they were presently startled by the fact that the sound was actually *approaching* them! With a sudden

instinct they both galloped towards the lagoon. As the timber opened before them Jim uttered a long ecstatic shout. "Why, it's *them!*"

At a first glance it seemed to Clarence as if the whole plain beyond was broken up and rolling in tumbling waves or furrows towards them. A second glance showed the tossing fronts of a vast herd of buffaloes, and here and there, darting in and out and among them, or emerging from the cloud of dust behind, wild figures and flashes of fire. With the idea of water still in his mind, it seemed as if some tumultuous tidal wave were sweeping unseen towards the lagoon, carrying everything before it. He turned with eager eyes in speechless expectancy to his companion.

Alack! that redoubtable hero and mighty hunter was, to all appearances, equally speechless and astonished! It was true that he remained rooted to the saddle, a lank, still, heroic figure, alternately grasping his hatchet and gun with a kind of spasmodic regularity! How long he would have continued this could never be known, for the next moment, with a deafening crash, the herd broke through the brush and, swerving at the right of the lagoon, bore down directly upon them. All further doubt or hesitation on their part was stopped. The far-seeing, sagacious Mexican plug, with a terrific snort, wheeled and fled furiously with his rider. Moved no doubt by touching fidelity, Clarence's humbler team-horse instantly followed. In a few moments those devoted animals struggled neck to neck in noble emulation.

"What are we goin' off this way for?" gasped the simple Clarence.

"Peyton and Gildersleeve are back there—and they'll see us," gasped Jim in reply.

It struck Clarence that the buffaloes were much nearer them than the hunting-party, and that the tramping hoofs of a dozen bulls were close behind them, but with another gasp he shouted—"When are we going to hunt 'em?"

"Hunt *them*," screamed Jim, with an hysterical outburst of truth; "why, they're huntin' *us*—dash it."

Indeed, there was no doubt that their frenzied horses were flying before the equally frenzied herd behind them. They gained a momentary advantage by riding into one of the fissures, and out again on the other side, while their pursuers were obliged to make a detour. But in a few minutes they were overtaken by that part of the herd who had taken the other and nearer side of the lagoon, and were now fairly in the midst of them. The ground shook with their trampling hoofs; their steaming breath, mingling with the stinging dust that filled the air, half choked and blinded Clarence. He was dimly conscious that Jim had wildly thrown his hatchet at a cow-buffalo pressing close upon his flanks. As they swept down into another gully he saw him raise his fateful gun in utter desperation. Clarence crouched low on his horse's outstretched neck. There was a blinding flash; a single, stunning report from both barrels; Jim reeled in one way half out of the saddle, while the smoking gun seemed to leap in another over his head, and then rider and horse vanished in a choking cloud of dust and gunpowder. A moment after Clarence's horse stopped with a sudden check, and the boy felt himself hurled over its head into the gully, alighting on something that seemed to be a bounding cushion of curled and twisted hair. It was the shaggy shoulder of an enormous buffalo! For Jim's desperate random shot and double charge had taken effect on the near hind leg of a preceding bull, tearing away the flesh and ham-stringing the animal, who had dropped in the gully just in front of Clarence's horse.

Dazed, but unhurt, the boy rolled from the lifted forequarters of the struggling brute to the ground. Then he staggered to his feet again; not only his horse was gone, but the whole herd of buffaloes seemed to have passed too, and he could hear the shouts of unseen hunters now ahead of him. They had evidently overlooked his fall, and the

gully had concealed him. The sides before him were too steep for his aching limbs to climb; the slope by which he and the bull descended when the collision occurred was behind the wounded animal. Clarence was staggering towards it, when the bull, by a supreme effort, lifted itself on three legs, half turned, and faced him.

These events had passed too quickly for the inexperienced boy to have felt any active fear, or indeed anything but wild excitement and confusion. But the spectacle of that shaggy and enormous front, that seemed to fill the whole gully, rising with awful deliberation between him and escape, sent a thrill of terror through his frame. The great, dull, bloodshot eyes glared at him with a dumb, wondering fury; the large wet nostrils were so near that their first snort of inarticulate rage made him reel backwards as from a blow. The gully was only a narrow and short fissure or subsidence of the plain; a few paces more of retreat and he would be at its end, against an almost perpendicular bank fifteen feet high. If he attempted to climb its crumbling sides, and fell, there would be those short but terrible horns waiting to impale him! It seemed too terrible, too cruel! He was so small beside this overgrown monster. It wasn't fair! The tears started to his eyes, and then, in a rage at the injustice of Fate, he stood doggedly still with clenched fists. He fixed his gaze with half hysterical, childish fury on those lurid eyes; he did not know that, owing to the strange magnifying power of the bull's convex pupils, he, Clarence, appeared much bigger than he really was to the brute's heavy consciousness, the distance from him most deceptive, and that it was to this fact that hunters so often owed their escape. He only thought of some desperate means of attack. Ah! the six-shooter. It was still in his pocket. He drew it nervously, hopelessly—it looked so small compared with his large enemy!

He presented it with flashing eyes, and pulled the trigger. A feeble click followed—another, and again!

Even *this* had mocked him. He pulled the trigger once more wildly; there was a sudden explosion, and another. He stepped back; the balls had apparently flattened themselves harmlessly on the bull's forehead. He pulled again hopelessly; there was another report, a sudden furious bellow, and the enormous brute threw his head savagely to one side, burying his left horn deep in the crumbling bank beside him. Again and again he charged the bank, driving his left horn home, and bringing down the stones and earth in showers. It was some seconds before Clarence saw, in a single glimpse of that wildly tossing crest, the reason of this fury. The blood was pouring from his left eye, penetrated by the last bullet; the bull was blinded! A terrible revulsion of feeling, a sudden sense of remorse that was for the moment more awful than even his previous fear, overcame him. *He* had done *that thing!* As much to fly from the dreadful spectacle as any instinct of self-preservation, he took advantage of the next mad paroxysm of pain and blindness that always impelled the suffering beast towards the left, to slip past him on the right, reach the incline, and scramble wildly up to the plain again. Here he ran confusedly forward—not knowing whither—only caring to escape that agonised bellowing, to shut out for ever the accusing look of that huge, blood-weltering eye.

Suddenly he heard a distant angry shout. To his first hurried glance the plain had seemed empty, but looking up he saw two horsemen rapidly advancing with a led horse behind them—his own. With the blessed sense of relief that overtook him now came the fevered desire for sympathy, and to tell them all. But as they came nearer he saw that they were Gildersleeve the scout and Henry Benham, and that, far from sharing any delight in his deliverance, their faces only exhibited irascible impatience. Overcome by this new defeat the boy stopped, again dumb and dogged.

"Now then, blank it all, *will* you get up and come along,

or do you reckon to keep the train waiting another hour over your blanked foolishness?" said Gildersleeve savagely.

The boy hesitated, and then mounted mechanically, without a word.

"'Twould have served 'em right to have gone and left 'em," muttered Benham vindictively.

For one wild instant Clarence thought of throwing himself from his horse and bidding them go on and leave him. But before he could put this thought into action, the two men were galloping forward, with his horse led by a lariat fastened to the horn of Gildersleeve's saddle.

In two hours more they had overtaken the train, already on the march, and were in the midst of the group of outriders. Judge Peyton's face, albeit a trifle perplexed, turned towards Clarence with a kindly, half-tolerant look of welcome. The boy's heart instantly melted with forgiveness.

"Well, my boy, let's hear *your* story. What happened?"

Clarence cast a hurried glance around, and saw Jim, with face averted, riding gloomily behind. Then, nervously and hurriedly, he told how he had been thrown into the gully on the back of the wounded buffalo, and the manner of his escape. An audible titter ran through the cavalcade. Mr. Peyton regarded him gravely. "But how did the buffalo get so conveniently into the gully?" he asked.

"Jim Hooker lamed him with a shot-gun, and he fell over," said Clarence timidly.

A roar of Homeric laughter went up from the party. Clarence looked up, stung and startled, but caught a single glimpse of Jim Hooker's face that made him forget his own mortification. In its hopeless, heart-sick, and utterly beaten dejection—the first and only real expression he had seen on it—he read the dreadful truth! Jim's *reputation* had ruined him! The one genuine and striking episode of his life—the one trustworthy account he had given of it—had been unanimously accepted as the biggest and most consummate lie of his record!

CHAPTER VII.

With this incident of the hunt closed, to Clarence, the last remembered episode of his journey. But he did not know until long after that it had also closed to him what might have been the opening of a new career. For it had been Judge Peyton's intention in adopting Susy to include a certain guardianship and protection of the boy, provided he could get the consent of that vague relation to whom he was consigned. But it had been pointed out by Mrs. Peyton and her brother that Clarence's association with Jim Hooker had made him a doubtful companion for Susy, and even the Judge himself was forced to admit that the boy's apparent taste for evil company was inconsistent with his alleged birth and breeding. Unfortunately, Clarence, in the conviction of being hopelessly misunderstood, and that dogged acquiescence to fate which was one of his characteristics, was too proud to correct the impression by any of the hypocrisies of childhood. He had also a cloudy instinct of loyalty to Jim in his disgrace, without, however, experiencing either the sympathy of an equal or the zeal of a partisan, but rather—if it could be said of a boy of his years—with the patronage and protection of a superior. So he accepted without demur the intimation that when the train reached California he would be forwarded from Stockton with an outfit and a letter of explanation to Sacramento—it being understood that in the event of not finding his relative he would return to the Peytons in one of the Southern valleys, where they elected to purchase a tract of land.

With this outlook, and the prospect of change, independence, and all the rich possibilities that, to the imagination of youth, are included in them, Clarence had found the days dragging. The halt at Salt Lake, the transit of the dreary Alkali desert, even the wild passage of the Sierras,

were but a blurred picture in his memory. The sight of eternal snows, and the rolling of endless ranks of pines; the first glimpse of a hillside of wild oats, the spectacle of a rushing yellow river, that to his fancy seemed tinged with gold, were momentary excitements, quickly forgotten. But when one morning, halting at the outskirts of a struggling settlement, he found the entire party eagerly gathered around a passing stranger, who had taken from his saddle-bags a small buckskin pouch to show them a double handful of shining scales of metal, Clarence felt the first feverish and overmastering thrill of the gold-seekers. Breathlessly he followed the breathless questions and careless replies. The gold had been dug out of a *placer* only thirty miles away—it might be worth, say, a hundred and fifty dollars—it was only *his* share of a week's work with two partners. It was not much—"the country was getting played out with fresh arrivals and greenhorns." All this falling carelessly from the unshaven lips of a dusty, roughly-dressed man, with a long-handled shovel and pickaxe strapped on his back, and a frying-pan depending from his saddle. But no panoplied or armed knight ever seemed so heroic or independent a figure to Clarence. What could be finer than the noble scorn conveyed in his critical survey of the train, with its comfortable covered waggons and appliances of civilisation? "Ye'll hev to get rid of them ther fixins if yer goin' in for *placer* diggin'!" What a corroboration of Clarence's real thoughts! What a picture of independence was this! The picturesque scout, the all-powerful Judge Peyton, the daring young officer, all crumbled on their clayey pedestals before this hero in a red flannel shirt and high-topped boots! To stroll around in the open air all day, and pick up those shining bits of metal, without study, without method or routine—this was really life—to some day come upon that large nugget "you couldn't lift"—that was worth as much as the train and horses—such a one as the stranger said was found the other

day at Sawyer's Bar—this was worth giving up everything for. That rough man, with his smile of careless superiority, was the living link between Clarence and the Thousand and One Nights; in him were Aladdin and Sinbad incarnate.

Two days later they reached Stockton. Here Clarence, whose single suit of clothes had been reinforced by patching, odds and ends from Peyton's stores, and an extraordinary costume of army cloth, got up by the regimental tailor of Fort Ridge, was taken to be refitted at a general furnishing "emporium." But alas! in the selection of the clothing for that adult locality scant provision seemed to have been made for a boy of Clarence's years, and he was with difficulty fitted from an old condemned Government stores with "a boy's" seaman suit and a brass-button pea-jacket. To this outfit Mr. Peyton added a small sum of money for his expenses, and a letter of explanation to his cousin. The stage-coach was to start at noon. It only remained for Clarence to take leave of the party. The final parting with Susy had been discounted on the two previous days with some tears, small frights and clingings, and the expressed determination on the child's part "to go with him;" but in the excitement of the arrival at Stockton it was still further mitigated, and under the influence of a little present from Clarence—his first disbursement of his small capital—had at last taken the form and promise of merely temporary separation. Nevertheless, when the boy's scanty pack was deposited under the stage-coach seat, and he had been left alone, he ran rapidly back to the train for one moment more with Susy. Panting and a little frightened, he reached Mrs. Peyton's car.

"Goodness! You're not gone yet," said Mrs. Peyton sharply. "Do you want to lose the stage?"

An instant before, in his loneliness, he might have answered "Yes." But under the cruel sting of Mrs. Peyton's evident annoyance at his reappearance he felt his legs

suddenly tremble, and his voice left him. He did not dare to look at Susy. But her voice rose comfortably from the depths of the waggon where she was sitting.

"The stage will be goned away, Kla'uns."

She, too! Shame at his foolish weakness sent the yearning blood that had settled round his heart flying back into his face.

"I was looking for—for—for Jim, ma'am," he said at last boldly.

He saw the look of disgust pass over Mrs. Peyton's face, and felt a malicious satisfaction as he turned and ran back to the stage. But here, to his surprise, he actually found Jim, whom he really hadn't thought of, darkly watching the last strapping of luggage. With a manner calculated to convey the impression to the other passengers that he was parting from a brother criminal, probably on his way to a State prison, Jim shook hands gloomily with Clarence, and eyed the other passengers furtively between his matted locks.

"Ef ye hear o' anythin' happenin', ye'll know what's up," he said, in a low, hoarse, but perfectly audible whisper. "Me and them's bound to part kompany afore long. Tell the fellows at Deadman's Gulch to look out for me at any time."

Although Clarence was not going to Deadman's Gulch, knew nothing of it, and had a faint suspicion that Jim was equally ignorant, yet as one or two of the passengers glanced anxiously at the demure, grey-eyed boy who seemed booked for such a baleful destination, he really felt the half-delighted, half-frightened consciousness that he was starting in life under fascinating, immoral pretences. But the forward spring of the fine-spirited horses, the quickened motion, the glittering sunlight, and the thought that he really was leaving behind him all the shackles of dependence and custom, and plunging into a life of freedom, drove all else from his mind. He turned at last from this hopeful, blissful future, and began to examine his fellow-passengers with

boyish curiosity. Wedged in between two silent men on the front seat, one of whom seemed a farmer, and the other, by his black attire, a professional man, Clarence was finally attracted by a black-mantled, dark-haired, bonnetless woman on the back seat, whose attention seemed to be monopolised by the jocular gallantries of her companions and the two men before her in the middle seat. From her position he could see little more than her dark eyes, which occasionally seemed to meet his frank curiosity in an amused sort of way, but he was chiefly struck by the pretty foreign sound of her musical voice, which was unlike anything he had ever heard before, and—alas! for the inconstancy of youth—much finer than Mrs. Peyton's. Presently his farmer companion, casting a patronising glance on Clarence's pea-jacket and brass buttons, said cheerily—

"Jest off a voyage, sonny?"

"No, sir," stammered Clarence; "I came across the plains."

"Then I reckon that's the rig-out for the crew of a prairie schooner, eh?" There was a laugh at this which perplexed Clarence. Observing it, the humourist kindly condescended to explain that "prairie schooner" was the current slang for an emigrant waggon.

"I couldn't," explained Clarence, naïvely looking at the dark eyes on the back seat, "get any clothes at Stockton but these; I suppose the folks didn't think there'd ever be boys in California."

The simplicity of this speech evidently impressed the others, for the two men in the middle seats turned at a whisper from the lady and regarded him curiously. Clarence blushed slightly and became silent. Presently the vehicle began to slacken its speed. They were ascending a hill; on either bank grew huge cottonwoods, from which occasionally depended a beautiful scarlet vine.

"Ah! eet ees pretty," said the lady, nodding her black veiled head towards it. "Eet is good in ze hair."

One of the men made an awkward attempt to clutch a spray from the window. A brilliant inspiration flashed upon Clarence. When the stage began the ascent of the next hill, following the example of an outside passenger, he jumped down to walk. At the top of the hill he rejoined the stage, flushed and panting, but carrying a small branch of the vine in his scratched hands. Handing it to the man on the middle seat, he said, with grave, boyish politeness—"Please—for the lady."

A slight smile passed over the face of Clarence's neighbours. The bonnetless woman nodded a pleasant acknowledgment, and coquettishly wound the vine in her glossy hair. The dark man at his side, who hadn't spoken yet, turned to Clarence drily—

"If you're goin' to keep up this gait, sonny, I reckon ye won't find much trouble gettin' a man's suit to fit you by the time you reach Sacramento."

Clarence didn't quite understand him, but noticed that a singular gravity seemed to overtake the two jocular men on the middle seat, and the lady looked out of the window. He came to the conclusion that he had made a mistake about alluding to his clothes and his size. He must try and behave more manly. That opportunity seemed to be offered two hours later, when the stage stopped at a wayside hotel or restaurant.

Two or three passengers had got down to refresh themselves at the bar. His right and left hand neighbours were, however, engaged in a drawling conversation on the comparative merits of San Francisco sand-hill and water lots; the jocular occupants of the middle seats were still engrossed with the lady. Clarence slipped out of the stage and entered the bar-room with some ostentation. The complete ignoring of his person by the bar-keeper and his customers, however, somewhat disconcerted him. He hesitated a moment, and then returned gravely to the stage door and opened it.

"Would you mind taking a drink with me, sir?" said Clarence politely, addressing the farmer-looking passenger, who had been most civil to him. A dead silence followed. The two men on the middle seat faced entirely around to gaze at him.

"The Commodore asks if you'll take a drink with him," explained one of the men to Clarence's friend with the greatest seriousness.

"Eh? Oh, yes, certainly," returned that gentleman, changing his astonished expression to one of the deepest gravity, "seeing it's the Commodore."

"And perhaps you and your friend will join too?" said Clarence timidly to the passenger who had explained; "and you too, sir?" he added to the dark man.

"Really, gentlemen, I don't see how we can refuse," said the latter, rising with the greatest formality, and appealing to the others. "A compliment of this kind from our distinguished friend is not to be taken lightly."

"I have observed, sir, that the Commodore's head is level," returned the other man with equal gravity.

Clarence could have wished they had not treated his first hospitable effort quite so formally, but as they stepped from the coach with unbending faces he led them, a little frightened, into the bar-room. Here, unfortunately, as he was barely able to reach over the counter, the bar-keeper would have again overlooked him, but for a quick glance from the dark man, which seemed to change even the bar-keeper's perfunctory smiling face into supernatural gravity.

"The Commodore is standing treat," said the dark man, with unbroken seriousness, indicating Clarence, and leaning back with an air of respectful formality. "*I* will take straight whisky. The Commodore, on account of just changing climate, will, I believe, for the present content himself with lemon soda."

Clarence had previously resolved to take whisky like

the others, but a little doubtful of the politeness of countermanding his guest's order, and perhaps slightly embarrassed by the fact that all the other customers seemed to have gathered round him and his party with equally immovable faces, he said hurriedly, "Lemon soda for me, please."

"The Commodore," said the bar-keeper, with impassive features, as he bent forward and wiped the counter with professional deliberation, "is right. No matter how much a man may be accustomed all his life to liquor, when he is changing climate, gentlemen, he says 'lemon soda for me' all the time."

"Perhaps," said Clarence, brightening, "*you* will join too?"

"I shall be proud on this occasion, sir."

"I think," said the tall man, still as ceremoniously unbending as before, "that there can be but one toast here, gentlemen. I give you the health of the Commodore. May his shadow never be less!"

The health was drunk solemnly. Clarence felt his cheeks tingle, and in his excitement drank his own health with the others. Yet he was disappointed that there was not more joviality, he wondered if men always drank together so stiffly. And it occurred to him that it would be expensive. Nevertheless, he had his purse all ready ostentatiously in his hand; in fact, the paying for it out of his own money was not the least manly and independent pleasure he had promised himself. "How much?" he asked, with an affectation of carelessness. The bar-keeper cast his eye professionally over the bar-room. "I think you said treats for the crowd; call it twenty dollars to make even change."

Clarence's heart sank. He had heard already of the exaggeration of California prices. Twenty dollars! It was half his fortune. Nevertheless, with an heroic effort, he controlled himself, and with slightly nervous fingers counted out the money. It struck him, however, as

curious, not to say ungentlemanly, that the bystanders craned their necks over his shoulder to look at the contents of his purse, although some slight explanation was offered by the tall man.

"The Commodore's purse, gentlemen, is really a singular one. Permit me," he said, taking it from Clarence's hand with great politeness. "It is one of the new pattern, you observe, quite worthy of inspection." He handed it to a man behind him, who in turn handed it to another, while a chorus of "suthin' quite new," "the latest style," followed it in its passage round the room, and indicated to Clarence its whereabouts. It was presently handed back to the bar-keeper, who had begged also to inspect it, and who, with an air of scrupulous ceremony, insisted upon placing it himself in Clarence's side pocket, as if it were an important part of his function. The driver here called "all aboard." The passengers hurriedly re-seated themselves, and the episode abruptly ended. For, to Clarence's surprise, these attentive friends of a moment ago at once became interested in the views of a new passenger concerning the local politics of San Francisco, and he found himself utterly forgotten. The bonnetless woman had changed her position, and her head was no longer visible. The disillusion and depression that overcame him suddenly were as complete as his previous expectations and hopefulness had been extravagant. For the first time his utter unimportance in the world and his inadequacy to this new life around him came upon him crushingly.

The heat and jolting of the stage caused him to fall into a slight slumber, and when he awoke he found his two neighbours had just got out at a wayside station. They had evidently not cared to waken him to say "Good-bye." From the conversation of the other passengers he learned that the tall man was a well-known gambler, and the one who looked like a farmer was a ship captain who had become a wealthy merchant. Clarence thought he understood now why the latter had asked him if he came

off a voyage, and that the nickname of "Commodore" given to him, Clarence, was some joke intended for the captain's understanding. He missed them, for he wanted to talk to them about his relative at Sacramento whom he was now so soon to see. At last, between sleeping and waking, the end of his journey was unexpectedly reached. It was dark, but, being "steamer night," the shops and business places were still open, and Mr. Peyton had arranged that the stage driver should deliver Clarence at the address of his relative in "J. Street," an address which Clarence had luckily remembered. But the boy was somewhat discomfited to find that it was a large office or banking-house. He, however, descended from the stage, and, with his small pack in his hand, entered the building as the stage drove off, and addressing one of the busy clerks, asked for "Mr. Jackson Brant."

There was no such person in the office. There never had been any such person. The bank had always occupied that building. Was there not some mistake in the number?

No! the name, number, and street had been deeply engrafted in the boy's recollection. Stop! it might be the name of a customer who had given his address at the bank. The clerk who made this suggestion disappeared promptly to make inquiries in the counting-room. Clarence, with a rapidly-beating heart, awaited him. The clerk returned. There was no such name on the books. Jackson Brant was utterly unknown to every one in the establishment.

For an instant the counter against which the boy was leaning seemed to yield with his weight; he was obliged to steady himself with both hands to keep from falling. It was not his disappointment—which was terrible; it was not a thought of his future—which seemed hopeless; it was not his injured pride at appearing to have wilfully deceived Mr. Peyton—which was more dreadful than all these—but it was the sudden, sickening sense that *he* himself had been deceived, tricked, and fooled! For it flashed upon him for

the first time that the vague sense of wrong which had always haunted him was this—that this was the vile culmination of a plan to *get rid of him*, and that he had been deliberately lost and led astray by his relatives as helplessly and completely as a useless cat or dog!

Perhaps there was something of this in his face, for the clerk, staring at him, bade him sit down for a moment, and again vanished into the mysterious interior. Clarence had no conception how long he was absent, or indeed of anything but his own breathless thoughts, for he was conscious of wondering afterwards why the clerk was leading him through a door in the counter into an inner room of many desks, and again through a glass door into a smaller office where a preternaturally busy-looking man sat writing at a desk. Without looking up, but pausing only to apply a blotting-pad to the paper before him, the man said crisply—

"So you've been consigned to some one who don't seem to turn up, and can't be found, eh? Never mind that," as Clarence laid Peyton's letter before him. "Can't read it now. Well, I suppose you want to be shipped back to Stockton?"

"No!" said the boy, recovering his voice with an effort.

"Eh, that's business though. Know anybody here?"

"Not a living soul; that's why they sent me," said the boy, in sudden reckless desperation. He was the more furious that he knew the tears were standing in his eyes.

The idea seemed to strike the man amusingly. "Looks a little like it, don't it?" he said, smiling grimly at the paper before him. "Got any money?"

"A little."

"How much?"

"About twenty dollars," said Clarence hesitatingly.

The man opened a small drawer at his side, mechanically, for he did not raise his eyes, and took out two ten-dollar gold pieces. "I'll go twenty better," he said, laying them down on the desk. "That'll give you a chance to look around.

Come back here, if you don't see your way clear." He dipped his pen into the ink with a significant gesture as if closing the interview.

Clarence pushed back the coin. "I'm not a beggar," he said doggedly.

The man this time raised his head and surveyed the boy with two keen eyes. "You're not, hey? Well, do I look like one?"

"No," stammered Clarence, as he glanced into the man's haughty eyes.

"Yet, if I were in your fix, I'd take that money and be glad to get it."

"If you'll let me pay you back again," said Clarence, a little ashamed, and considerably frightened at his implied accusation of the man before him.

"You can," said the man, bending over his desk again.

Clarence took up the money and awkwardly drew out his purse. But it was the first time he had touched it since it was returned to him in the bar-room, and it struck him that it was heavy and full—indeed, so full that on opening it a few coins rolled out on to the floor. The man looked up abruptly.

"I thought you said you had only twenty dollars?" he remarked grimly.

"Mr. Peyton gave me forty," returned Clarence, stupefied and blushing. "I spent twenty dollars for drinks at the bar—and," he stammered, "I—I—I don't know how the rest came here."

"You spent twenty dollars for *drinks?*" said the man, laying down his pen and leaning back in his chair to gaze at the boy.

"Yes—that is—I treated some gentlemen of the stage, sir, at Davidson's Crossing."

"Did you treat the whole stage company?"

"No, sir, only about four or five—and the bar-keeper. But everything's so dear in California. *I* know that."

"Evidently. But it don't seem to make much difference with *you*," said the man, glancing at the purse.

"They wanted my purse to look at," said Clarence hurriedly, "and that's how the thing happened. Somebody put *his own money* back into *my* purse by accident."

"Of course," said the man grimly.

"Yes, that's the reason," said Clarence, a little relieved, but somewhat embarrassed by the man's persistent eyes.

"Then, of course," said the other quietly, "you don't require my twenty dollars now."

"But," returned Clarence hesitatingly, "this isn't *my* money. I must find out who it belongs to, and give it back again. Perhaps," he added timidly, "I might leave it here with you, and call for it when I find the man, and send him here."

With the greatest gravity he here separated the surplus from what was left of Peyton's gift and the twenty dollars he had just received. The balance unaccounted for was forty dollars. He laid it on the desk before the man, who, still looking at him, rose and opened the door.

"Mr. Reed."

The clerk who had shown Clarence in appeared.

"Open an account with"—— He stopped and turned interrogatively to Clarence.

"Clarence Brant," said Clarence, colouring with excitement.

"With Clarence Brant. Take that deposit," pointing to the money, "and give him a receipt." He paused, as the clerk retired with a wondering gaze at the money, looked again at Clarence, said, "I think *you'll* do," and re-entered the private office, closing the door behind him.

I hope it will not be deemed inconceivable that Clarence, only a few moments before crushed with bitter disappointment and the hopeless revelations of his abandonment by his relatives, now felt himself lifted up suddenly into an imaginary height of independence and manhood! He was

leaving the bank in which he stood a minute before a friendless boy—not as a successful beggar, for this important man had disclaimed the idea, but absolutely as a customer! a depositor! a business man like the grown-up clients who were thronging the outer office, and before the eyes of the clerk who had pitied him! And he, Clarence, had been spoken to by this man, whose name he now recognised as the one that was on the door of the building—a man of whom his fellow-passengers had spoken of with admiring envy—a banker famous in all California! Will it be deemed incredible that this imaginative and hopeful boy, forgetting all else, the object of his visit, and even the fact that he considered this money was not his own, actually put his hat a little on one side as he strolled out on his way to the streets and perspective fortune?

Two hours later the banker had another visitor. It chanced to be the farmer-looking man who had been Clarence's fellow-passenger. Evidently a privileged person, he was at once ushered as "Captain Stevens" into the presence of the banker. At the end of a familiar business interview the captain asked carelessly—

"Any letters for me?"

The busy banker pointed with his pen to the letter "S" in a row of alphabetically labelled pigeon-holes against the wall. The captain, having selected his correspondence, paused with a letter in his hand.

"Look here, Carden, there are letters here for some chap called 'John Silsbee.' They were here when I called—ten weeks ago."

"Well?"

"That's the name of that Pike County man who was killed by Injins in the plains. The 'Frisco papers had all the particulars last night; may be it's for that fellow. It hasn't got a postmark. Who left it here?"

Mr. Carden summoned a clerk. It appeared that the letter had been left by a certain Brant Fanquier to be called for.

Captain Stevens smiled. "Brant's been too busy dealin' faro to think of 'em agin, and since that shootin' affair at Angels' I hear he's skipped to the southern coast somewhere. Cal Johnson, his old chum, was in the up-stage from Stockton this afternoon."

"Did you come by the up-stage from Stockton this afternoon?" said Carden, looking up.

"Yes, as far as Ten-mile Station—rode the rest of the way here."

"Did you notice a queer little old-fashioned kid—about so high—like a runaway schoolboy?"

"Did I? By G—d, sir, he treated me to drinks."

Carden jumped from his chair. "Then he wasn't lying!"

"No! We let him do it—but we made it good for the little chap afterwards. Hello! What's up?"

But Mr. Carden was already in the outer office beside the clerk who had admitted Clarence.

"You remember that boy Brant who was here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did he go?"

"Don't know, sir."

"Go and find him somewhere and somehow. Go to all the hotels, restaurants, and gin-mills near here, and hunt him up. Take some one with you—if you can't do it alone. Bring him back here, quick!"

It was nearly midnight when the clerk fruitlessly returned. It was the fierce high noon of "steamer night;" lights flashed brilliantly from shops, counting-houses, drinking-saloons, and gambling-hells. The streets were yet full of eager, hurrying feet, swift to fortune, ambition, pleasure, or crime. But from among these deeper, harsher footfalls, the echo of the homeless boy's light, innocent tread seemed to have died out for ever.

CHAPTER VIII.

When Clarence was once more in the busy street before the bank, it seemed clear to his boyish mind that, being now cast adrift upon the world and responsible to no one, there was no reason why he should not at once proceed to the nearest gold-mines! The idea of returning to Mr. Peyton and Susy, as a disowned and abandoned outcast, was not to be thought of. He would purchase some kind of an outfit, such as he had seen the miners carry, and start off as soon as he had got his supper. But although one of his most delightful anticipations had been the unfettered freedom of ordering a meal at a restaurant, on entering the first one he found himself the object of so much curiosity, partly from his size and partly from his dress, which the unfortunate boy was beginning to suspect was really preposterous, that he turned away with a stammered excuse, and did not try another. Further on he found a baker's shop, where he refreshed himself with some gingerbread and lemon soda. At an adjacent grocery he purchased some herrings, smoked beef, and biscuits, as future provisions for his "pack" or kit. Then began his real quest for an outfit. In an hour he had secured—ostensibly for some friend, to avoid curious inquiry—a pan, a blanket, a shovel and pick, all of which he deposited at the baker's—his unostentatious headquarters—with the exception of a pair of disguising high boots that half hid his sailor trousers, which he kept to put on at the last. Even to his inexperience the cost of these articles seemed enormous; when his purchases were complete, of his entire capital scarcely four dollars remained! Yet in the fond illusions of boyhood these rude appointments seemed possessed of far more value than the gold he had given in exchange for them, and he had enjoyed a child's delight in testing the transforming magic of money.

Meanwhile the feverish contact of the crowded street had, strange to say, increased his loneliness, while the ruder joviality of its dissipations began to fill him with a vague uneasiness; the passing glimpse of dancing halls and gaudily whirling figures that seemed only feminine in their apparel; the shouts and boisterous choruses from concert rooms; the groups of drunken roysterers that congregated around the doors of saloons or hilariously charging down the streets, elbowed him against the wall, or humorously insisted on his company, discomposed and frightened him. He had known rude companionship before, but it was serious, practical, and under control. There was something in this vulgar degradation of intellect and power—qualities that Clarence had always boyishly worshipped—which sickened and disillusioned him. Later on a pistol shot in a crowd beyond, the rush of eager men past him, the disclosure of a limp and helpless figure against the wall, the closing of the crowd again around it, although it stirred him with a fearful curiosity, actually shocked him less hopelessly than their brutish enjoyments and abandonment.

It was in one of these rushes that he had been crushed against a swinging door, which, giving way to his pressure, disclosed to his wondering eyes a long, glitteringly-adorned, and brightly-lit room, densely filled with a silent, attentive throng in attitudes of decorous abstraction and preoccupation, that even the shouts and tumult at its very doors could not disturb. Men of all ranks and conditions, plainly or elaborately clad, were grouped together under this magic spell of silence and attention. The tables before them were covered with cards and loose heaps of gold and silver. A clicking, the rattling of an ivory ball, and the frequent, formal, lazy reiteration of some unintelligible sentence was all that he heard. But by a sudden instinct he *understood* it all. It was a gambling saloon!

Encouraged by the decorous stillness, and the fact that everybody appeared too much engaged to notice him, the

boy drew timidly beside one of the tables. It was covered with a number of cards, on which were placed certain sums of money. Looking down, Clarence saw that he was standing before a card that as yet had nothing on it. A single player at his side looked up, glanced at Clarence curiously, and then placed half-a-dozen gold pieces on the vacant card. Absorbed in the general aspect of the room and the players, Clarence did not notice that his neighbour won twice, and even *thrice*, upon that card. Becoming aware, however, that the player, while gathering in his gains, was smilingly regarding him, he moved in some embarrassment to the other end of the table where there seemed another gap in the crowd. It so chanced that here was also another vacant card. The previous neighbour of Clarence instantly shoved a sum of money across the table on the vacant card and won. At this the other players began to regard Clarence singularly, one or two of the spectators smiled, and the boy, colouring, moved awkwardly away. But his sleeve was caught by the successful player, who, detaining him gently, put three gold pieces into his hand.

"That's *your* share, sonny," he whispered.

"Share—for what?" stammered the astounded Clarence.

"For bringing me 'the luck,'" said the man.

Clarence stared. "Am I—to—to play with it?" he said, glancing at the coins and then at the table, in ignorance of the stranger's meaning.

"No, no!" said the man hurriedly, "don't do that. You'll lose it, sonny, sure! Don't you see *you bring the luck to others*, not to yourself. Keep it, old man, and run home!"

"I don't want it! I won't have it!" said Clarence, with a swift recollection of the manipulation of his purse that morning, and a sudden distrust of all mankind.

"There!" He turned back to the table and laid the money on the first vacant card he saw. In another moment, as it seemed to him, it was raked away by the dealer. A sense of relief came over him.

"There," said the man with an awed voice, and a strange fatuous look in his eye. "What did I tell you? You see, it's allus so! Now," he added roughly, "get up and get out o' this, afore you lose the boots and shirt off ye."

Clarence did not wait for a second command. With another glance round the room, he began to make his way through the crowd towards the front. But in that parting glance he caught a glimpse of a woman presiding over a "wheel of fortune" in a corner, whose face seemed familiar. He looked again timidly. In spite of an extraordinary head-dress or crown that she wore as the "Goddess of Fortune," he recognised, twisted in its tinsel, a certain scarlet vine which he had seen before; in spite of the hoarse formula which she was continually repeating, he recognised the foreign accent. It was the woman of the stage-coach! With a sudden dread that she might recognise him, and likewise demand his services "for luck," he turned and fled.

Once more in the open air, there came upon him a vague loathing and horror of the restless madness and feverish distraction of this half-civilised city. It was the more powerful that it was vague, and the outcome of some inward instinct. He found himself longing for the pure air and sympathetic loneliness of the plains and wilderness; he began to yearn for the companionship of his humble associates—the teamster, the scout Gildersleeve, and even Jim Hooker. But above all, and before all, was the wild desire to get away from these maddening streets and their bewildering occupants. He ran back to the baker's, gathered his purchases together, took advantage of a friendly doorway to strap them on his boyish shoulders, slipped into a side street, and struck out at once for the outskirts.

It had been his first intention to take stage to the nearest mining district, but the diminution of his small capital forbade that outlay, and he decided to walk there by the highroad, of whose general direction he had informed himself. In half-an-hour the lights of the flat, struggling city,

and their reflection in the shallow turbid river before it, had sunk well behind him. The air was cool and soft; a yellow moon swam in the slight haze that rose above the *tules*, in the distance a few scattered cottonwoods and sycamores marked like sentinels the road. When he had walked some distance he sat down beneath one of them, made a frugal supper from the dry rations in his pack, but in the absence of any spring he was forced to quench his thirst with a glass of water in a wayside tavern. Here he was good-humouredly offered something stronger, which he declined, and replied to certain curious interrogations by saying that he expected to overtake his friends in a waggon further on. A new distrust of mankind had begun to make the boy an adept in innocent falsehood, the more deceptive as his careless, cheerful manner, the result of his relief at leaving the city, and his perfect ease in the loving companionship of night and nature, certainly gave no indication of his homelessness and poverty.

It was long past midnight when, weary in body, but still hopeful and happy in mind, he turned off the dusty road into a vast rolling expanse of wild oats, with the same sense of security of rest as a traveller to his inn. Here, completely screened from view by the tall stalks of grain that rose thickly around him to the height of a man's shoulder, he beat down a few of them for a bed on which he deposited his blanket. Placing his pack for a pillow, he curled himself up in his blanket, and speedily fell asleep.

He awoke at sunrise refreshed, invigorated, and hungry. But he was forced to defer his first self-prepared breakfast until he had reached water, and a less dangerous place than the wild oat field to build his first camp-fire. This he found a mile further on, near some dwarf willows on the bank of a half-dry stream. Of his various efforts to prepare his first meal, the fire was the most successful; the coffee was somewhat too substantially thick, and the bacon and herring lacked definiteness of quality from having been cooked

in the same vessel. In this boyish picnic he missed Susy, and recalled, perhaps a little bitterly, her coldness at parting. But the novelty of his situation, the brilliant sunshine, and sense of freedom, and the road already awakening to dusty life with passing teams, dismissed anything but the future from his mind. Readjusting his pack, he stepped on cheerily. At noon he was overtaken by a teamster, who in return for a match to light his pipe gave him a lift of a dozen miles. It is to be feared that Clarence's account of himself was equally fanciful with his previous story, and that the teamster parted from him with a genuine regret, and a hope that he would soon be overtaken by his friends along the road. "And mind that you ain't such a fool agin to let 'em make you tote their dodd—blasted tools fur them!" he added unsuspectingly, pointing to Clarence's mining outfit. Thus saved the heaviest part of the day's journey, for the road was continually rising from the plains during the last six miles, Clarence was able yet to cover a considerable distance on foot before he halted for supper. Here he was again fortunate. An empty lumber team watering at the same spring, its driver offered to take Clarence's purchases—for the boy had profited by his late friend's suggestion to personally detach himself from his equipment—to Buckeye Mills for a dollar, which would also include a "shakedown passage" for himself on the floor of the waggon. "I reckon you've been foolin' away in Sacramento the money yer parents give yer fur return stage fare, eh? Don't lie, sonny," he added grimly, as the now artful Clarence smiled diplomatically. "I've been thar myself!" Luckily the excuse that he was "tired and sleepy" prevented further dangerous questioning, and the boy was soon really in deep slumber on the waggon floor.

He awoke betimes to find himself already in the mountains. Buckeye Mills was a straggling settlement, and Clarence prudently stopped any embarrassing inquiry from his friend by dropping off the waggon with his equipment

as they entered it, and hurriedly saying "Good-bye" from a cross-road through the woods. He had learned that the nearest mining-camp was five miles away, and its direction was indicated by a long wooden "flume" or water-way that alternately appeared and disappeared on the flank of the mountain opposite. The cooler and drier air, the grateful shadow of pine and bay, and the spicy balsamic odours that everywhere greeted him, thrilled and exhilarated him. The trail plunging sometimes into an undisturbed forest, he started the birds before him like a flight of arrows through its dim recesses; at times he hung breathlessly over the blue depths of cañons where the same forests were repeated a thousand feet below. Towards noon he struck into a rude road—evidently the thoroughfare of the locality—and was surprised to find that it—as well as the adjacent soil wherever disturbed—was a deep Indian red! Everywhere; along its sides, powdering the banks and boles of trees with its ruddy stain, in mounds and hillocks of piled dirt on the road, or in liquid paint-like pools, when a trickling stream had formed a gutter across it, there was always the same deep sanguinary colour. Once or twice it became more vivid in contact with the white teeth of quartz that peeped through it from the hillside or crossed the road in crumbled strata. One of those pieces Clarence picked up with a quickened pulse. It was veined and streaked with shining mica and tiny glittering cubes of mineral that *looked* like gold!

The road now began to descend towards a winding stream, shrunken by drought and ditching, that glared dazzlingly in the sunlight from its white bars of sand, or glistened in shining sheets and channels. Along its banks, and even encroaching upon its bed, were scattered a few mud cabins, strange-looking wooden troughs and gutters, and here and there, glancing through the leaves, the white canvas of tents. The stumps of felled trees and blackened spaces, as of recent fires, marked the stream on either side.

A sudden sense of disappointment overcame Clarence. It looked vulgar, common, and worse than all—*familiar*. It was like the unlovely outskirts of a dozen other prosaic settlements he had seen in less romantic localities. In that muddy red stream, pouring out of a wooden gutter, in which three or four bearded, slouching, half-naked figures were raking like *chiffoniers*, there was nothing to suggest the royal metal. Yet he was so absorbed in gazing at the scene, and had walked so rapidly during the past few minutes, that he was startled on turning a sharp corner of the road to come abruptly upon an outlying dwelling.

It was a nondescript building, half canvas and half boards. The interior, seen through the open door, was fitted up with side shelves, a counter carelessly piled with provisions, groceries, clothing, and hardware — with no attempt at display or even ordinary selection—and a table on which stood a demijohn and three or four dirty glasses. Two roughly-dressed men, whose long matted beards and hair left only their eyes and lips visible in the tangled hirsute wilderness below their slouched hats, were leaning against the opposite sides of the doorway smoking. Almost thrown against them in the rapid momentum of his descent, Clarence halted violently.

"Well, sonny, you needn't capsize the shanty," said the first man, without taking his pipe from his lips.

"If yer looking fur yer ma, she and yer Aunt Jane hev jest gone over to Parson Doolittle's to take tea," observed the second man lazily. "She allowed that you'ld wait."

"I'm—I'm—going to—to the mines," explained Clarence, with some hesitation. "I suppose this is the way."

The two men took their pipes from their lips, looked at each other, completely wiped every vestige of expression from their faces with the back of their hands, turned their eyes into the interior of the cabin, and said "Will yer come yer, now *will* yer?" Thus adjured, half-a-dozen men, also bearded and carrying pipes in their mouths, straggled out

of the shanty, and, filing in front of it, squatted down with their backs against the boards and gazed comfortably at the boy. Clarence began to feel uneasy.

"I'll give," said one, taking out his pipe and grimly eyeing Clarence, "a hundred dollars for him as he stands."

"And seein' as he's got that bran-new rig-out o' tools," said another, "I'll give a hundred and fifty—and the drinks. I've been," he added apologetically, "wantin' suthin' like this a long time."

"Well, gen'lemen," said the man who had first spoken to him, "lookin' at him by and large; takin' in, so to speak, the gin'ral gait of him in single harness, bearin' in mind the perfect freshness of him, and the coolness and size of his cheek — the easy downyness, previousness, and utter don't-care-a-damnativeness of his coming yer, I think two hundred ain't too much for him, and we'll call it a bargain."

Clarence's previous experience of this grim, smileless Californian chaff was not calculated to restore his confidence. He drew away from the cabin and repeated doggedly, "I asked you if this was the way to the mines."

"It *are* the mines, and these yere are the miners," said the first speaker gravely. "Permit me to interdoose 'em. This yere's Shasta Jim, this yere's Shortcard Billy, this is Nasty Bob, and this Slumgullion Dick. This yere's the Dook o' Chatham Street, the Livin' Skeleton, and me!"

"May we ask, fair young sir," said the Living Skeleton, who, however, seemed in fairly robust condition, "whence came ye on the wings of the morning, and whose Marble Halls ye hev left desolate?"

"I came across the plains, and got into Stockton two days ago on Mr. Peyton's train," said Clarence indignantly, seeing no reason now to conceal anything. "I came to Sacramento to find my cousin, who isn' living there any more. I don't see anything funny in *that!* I came here

to the mines to dig gold—because—because Mr. Silsbee, the man who was to bring me here and might have found my cousin for me, was killed by Indians."

"Hold up, sonny. Let me help ye," said the first speaker, rising to his feet. "*You* didn't get killed by Injins because you got lost out of a train with Silsbee's infant darter. Peyton picked you up while you was takin' care of her, and two days arter you kem up to the broken-down Silsbee waggons, with all the folks lyin' there slartered."

"Yes, sir," said Clarence, breathless with astonishment.

"And," continued the man, putting his hand gravely to his head as if to assist his memory, "when you was all alone on the plains with that little child, you saw one of those redskins, as near to you as I be, watchin' the train, and you didn't breathe or move while he was there?"

"Yes, sir," said Clarence eagerly.

"And you was shot at by Peyton, he thinkin' you was an Injin in the mesquite grass? And you once shot a buffalo that had been pitched with you down a gully—all by yourself?"

"Yes," said Clarence, crimson with wonder and pleasure. "You know me, then?"

"Well, ye-e-es," said the man gravely, parting his moustache with his fingers. "You see, *you've been here before.*"

"Before! Me?" repeated the astounded Clarence.

"Yes, before. Last night. You was taller then, and hadn't cut your hair. You cursed a good deal more than you do now. You drank a man's share of whisky, and you borrowed fifty dollars to get to Sacramento with. I reckon you haven't got it about you now, eh?"

Clarence's brain reeled in utter confusion and hopeless terror.

Was he going crazy, or had these cruel men learned his story from his faithless friends, and this was a part of the plot? He staggered forward, but the men had risen and

quickly encircled him, as if to prevent his escape. In vague and helpless desperation he gasped—

"What place is this?"

"Folks call it Deadman's Gulch."

Deadman's Gulch! A flash of intelligence lit up the boy's blind confusion. Deadman's Gulch! Could it have been Jim Hooker who had really run away, and had taken his name? He turned half-imploringly to the first speaker.

"Wasn't he older than me and bigger? Didn't he have a smooth, round face, and little eyes? Didn't he talk hoarse? Didn't he"—— he stopped hopelessly.

"Yes; oh, he wasn't a bit like you," said the man musingly. "Ye see, that's the h–ll of it! You're altogether *too many* and *too various* fur this camp?"

"I don't know who's been here before, or what they have said," said Clarence desperately—yet even in that desperation retaining the dogged loyalty to his old playmate which was part of his nature. "I don't know, and I don't care—there! I'm Clarence Brant, of Kentucky; I started in Silsbee's train from St. Jo, and I'm going to the mines, and you can't stop me!"

The man who had first spoken started, looked keenly at Clarence, and then turned to the others. The gentleman known as the Living Skeleton had obtruded his huge bulk in front of the boy, and, gazing at him, said reflectively, "Darned if it don't look like one of Brant's pups—sure!"

"Air ye any relation to Kernel Hamilton Brant, of Looeyville?" asked the first speaker.

Again that old question! Poor Clarence hesitated despairingly. Was he to go through the same cross-examination he had undergone with the Peytons? "Yes," he said doggedly, "I am—but he's dead. And you know it."

"Dead—of course." "Sartin." "He's dead." "The Kernel's planted," said the men in chorus.

"Well, yes," reflected the Living Skeleton ostentatiously, as one who spoke from experience. "Ham Brant's about

as bony now as they make 'em." "You bet! About the dustiest, deadest corpse you kin turn out," corroborated Slumgullion Dick, nodding his head gloomily to the others; "in point o' fack, es a corpse, about the last one I should keer to go huntin' fur."

"The Kernel's tech 'ud be cold and clammy!" concluded the Duke of Chatham Street, who had not yet spoken, "sure. But what did yer mammy say about it? Is she gettin' married agin? Did *she* send ye here?"

It seemed to Clarence that the Duke of Chatham Street here received a kick from his companions; but the boy repeated doggedly—

"I came to Sacramento to find my cousin, Jackson Brant; but he wasn't there."

"Jackson Brant!" echoed the first speaker, glancing at the others. "Did your mother say he was your cousin?"

"Yes," said Clarence wearily. "Good-bye."

"Hullo, sonny, where are you going?"

"To dig gold," said the boy. "And you know you can't prevent me, if it isn't on your claim. I know the law." He had heard Mr. Peyton discuss it at Stockton, and he fancied that the men, who were whispering among themselves, looked kinder than before, and as if they were no longer "acting" to him. The first speaker laid his hand on his shoulder and said, "All right, come with me, and I'll show you where to dig."

"Who are you?" said Clarence. "You call yourself only 'me.'"

"Well, you can call me Flynn—Tom Flynn."

"And you'll show me where I can dig—myself?"

"I will."

"Do you know," said Clarence timidly, yet with a half-conscious smile, "that I—I kinder bring luck?"

The man looked down upon him, and said gravely, but, as it struck Clarence, with a new kind of gravity, "I believe you."

"Yes," said Clarence eagerly, as they walked along together, "I brought luck to a man in Sacramento the other day." And he related with great earnestness his experience in the gambling-saloon. Not content with that —the sealed fountains of his childish deep being broken up by some mysterious sympathy—he spoke of his hospitable exploit with the passengers at the wayside bar, of the finding of his Fortunatus purse, and his deposit at the bank. Whether that characteristic old-fashioned reticence which had been such an important factor for good or ill in his future had suddenly deserted him, or whether some extraordinary prepossession in his companion had affected him, he did not know: but by the time the pair had reached the hillside, Flynn was in possession of all the boy's history. On one point only was his reserve unshaken. Conscious although he was of Jim Hooker's duplicity, he affected to treat it as a comrade's joke.

They halted at last in the middle of an apparently fertile hillside. Clarence shifted his shovel from his shoulders, unslung his pan, and looked at Flynn. "Dig anywhere here, where you like," said his companion carelessly, "and you'll be sure to find the colour. Fill your pan with the dirt, go to that sluice, and let the water run in on the top of the pan—workin' it round so"—he added, illustrating a rotary motion with the vessel. "Keep doing that until all the soil is washed out of it, and you have only the black sand at the bottom. Then work that the same way until you see the colour. Don't be afraid of washing the gold out of the pan—you couldn't do it if you tried. There, I'll leave you here, and you wait till I come back." With another grave nod and something like a smile in the only visible part of his bearded face—his eyes—he strode rapidly away.

Clarence did not lose time. Selecting a spot where the grass was less thick he broke through the soil and turned up two or three spadefuls of red soil. When he had filled

the pan and raised it to his shoulder he was astounded at its weight. He did not know that it was due to the red precipitate of iron that gave it its colour. Staggering along with his burden to the running sluice—which looked like an open wooden gutter—at the foot of the hill be began to carefully carry out Flynn's direction. The first dip of the pan in the running water carried off half the contents of the pan in liquid paint-like ooze. For a moment he gave way to boyish satisfaction in the sight and touch of this unctuous solution, and dabbled his fingers in it. A few moments more of rinsing and he came to the sediment of fine black sand that was beneath it. Another plunge and swilling of water in the pan, and—could he believe his eyes!—a few yellow tiny scales, scarcely larger than pins' heads, glittered among the sand. He poured it off. But his companion was right; the lighter sand shifted from side to side with the water, but the glittering points remained adhering by their own tiny specific gravity to the smooth surface of the bottom. It was "the colour"—Gold!

Clarence's heart seemed to give a great leap within him. A vision of wealth, of independence, of power, sprang before his dazzled eyes, and—a hand lightly touched him on the shoulder.

He started! In his complete preoccupation and excitement he had not heard the clatter of horse-hoofs, and to his amazement Flynn was already beside him, mounted, and leading a second horse.

"You kin ride," he said shortly.

"Yes," stammered Clarence; "but"——

"*But*—we've only got two hours to reach Buckeye Mills in time to catch the down stage. Drop all that, jump up, and come with me!"

"But I've just found gold," said the boy excitedly.

"And I've just found your—cousin. Come!"

He spurred his horse across Clarence's scattered implements, half helped, half lifted the boy into the saddle of the

second horse, and with a cut of his riata over the animal's haunches, the next moment they were both galloping furiously away.

CHAPTER IX.

Torn suddenly from his prospective future, but too much dominated by the man beside him to protest, Clarence was silent until a rise in the road a few minutes later partly abated their headlong speed, and gave him chance to recover his breath and courage.

"Where is my cousin?" he asked.

"In the southern county, two hundred miles from here."

"Are we going to him?"

"Yes."

They rode furiously forward again. It was nearly half-an-hour before they came to a longer ascent. Clarence could see that Flynn was from time to time examining him curiously under his slouched hat. This somewhat embarrassed him, but in his singular confidence in the man no distrust mingled with it.

"Ye never saw your—cousin?" he asked.

"No," said Clarence; "nor he me. I don't think he knew me much, anyway."

"How old mout ye be, Clarence?"

"Twelve."

"Well, as you're suthin' of a pup"—Clarence started, and recalled Peyton's first criticism of him—"I reckon to tell ye suthin'! Ye aint goin' to be skeert, or afeard, or lose yer sand, I kalkilate, for skunkin' aint in your breed. Well, wot ef I told ye that thish yer—thish yer—*cousin* o' yours was the biggest devil onhung!—that he'd just killed a man, and had to lite out elsewhere? And *thet's* why he didn't show up in Sacramento! What if I told you that?"

Clarence felt that this was somehow a little too much!

He was perfectly truthful, and therefore lifting his frank eyes to Flynn, he said—

"I should think you were talking a good deal like Jim Hooker!"

His companion stared, and suddenly reined up his horse, then bursting into a shout of laughter he galloped ahead, from time to time shaking his head, slapping his legs, and making the dim woods ring with his boisterous mirth. Then as suddenly becoming thoughtful again he rode off rapidly for half-an-hour, only speaking to Clarence to urge him forward, and assisting his progress by lashing the haunches of his horse. Luckily the boy was a good rider—a fact which Flynn seemed to thoroughly appreciate—or he would have been unseated a dozen times.

At last the straggling sheds of Buckeye Mills came into softer purple view on the opposite mountain. Then laying his hand on Clarence's shoulder as he reined in at his side, Flynn broke the silence.

"There, boy," he said, wiping the mirthful tears from his eyes. "I was only foolin'—only trying yer grit! This yer cousin I'm taking you to ez as quiet and soft-spoken and as old-fashioned ez you be. Why, he's that wrapped up in books and study that he lives alone in a big *adobe rancherie* among a lot o' Spanish, and he don't keer to see his own countrymen! Why, he's even changed his name, and calls himself Don Juan Robinson! But he's very rich; he owns three leagues of land and heaps of cattle and horses, and," glancing approvingly at Clarence's seat in the saddle, "I reckon you'll hev plenty of fun thar."

"But," hesitated Clarence—to whom this proposal seemed only a repetition of Peyton's charitable offer—"I think I'd better stay here and dig gold—*with you.*"

"And I think you'd better not," said the man, with a gravity that was very like a settled determination.

"But my cousin never came for me to Sacramento—nor sent, nor even wrote," persisted Clarence indignantly.

"Not to *you*, boy; but he wrote to the man whom he reckoned would bring you there—Jack Silsbee—and left it in the care of the bank. And Silsbee, being dead, didn't come for the letter; and as you didn't ask for it when you came, and didn't even mention Silsbee's name, that same letter was sent back to your cousin through me, because the bank thought we knew his whereabouts. It came to the gulch by an express rider, whilst you were prospecting, on the hillside. Rememberin' your story I took the liberty of opening it, and found out that your cousin had told Silsbee to bring you straight to him. So, I'm only doin' now what Silsbee would have done."

Any momentary doubt or suspicion that might have arisen in Clarence's mind vanished as he met his companion's steady and masterful eye. Even his disappointment was forgotten in the charm of this new-found friendship and protection. And as its outset had been marked by an unusual burst of confidence on Clarence's part, the boy in his gratitude now felt something of the timid shyness of a deeper feeling, and once more became reticent.

They were in time to snatch a hasty meal at Buckeye Mills before the stage arrived, and Clarence noticed that his friend, despite his rough dress and lawless aspect, provoked a marked degree of respect from those he met—in which, perhaps, a wholesome fear was mingled. It is certain that the two best places in the stage were given up to them without protest, and that a careless, almost supercilious, invitation to drink from Flynn was responded to with singular alacrity by all—including even two fastidiously-dressed and previously-reserved passengers. I am afraid that Clarence enjoyed this proof of his friend's singular dominance with a boyish pride, and, conscious of the curious eyes of the passengers, directed occasionally to himself, was somewhat ostentatious in his familiarity with this bearded autocrat.

At noon the next day they left the stage at a wayside ride station, and Flynn briefly informed Clarence that they

must again take horses. This at first seemed difficult in that out-of-the-way settlement, where they alone had stopped, but a whisper from the driver in the ear of the station-master produced a couple of fiery mustangs with the same accompaniment of cautious awe and mystery. For the next two days they travelled on horseback, resting by night at the lodgings of one or other of Flynn's friends in the outskirts of a large town, where they arrived in the darkness, and left before day. To any one more experienced than the simple-minded boy it would have been evident that Flynn was purposely avoiding the more travelled roads and conveyances; and when they changed horses again the next day's ride was through an apparently unbroken wilderness of scattered wood and rolling plain. Yet to Clarence, with his Pantheistic reliance and joyous sympathy with nature, the change was filled with exhilarating pleasure. The vast seas of tossing wild oats, the hillside still variegated with strange flowers, the virgin freshness of untrodden woods and leafy aisles, whose floors of moss or bark were undisturbed by human footprint, were a keen delight and novelty. More than this, his quick eye, trained perceptions, and frontier knowledge now stood him in good stead. His intuitive sense of distance, instincts of woodcraft, and his unerring detection of those signs, landmarks, and guide-posts of nature, undistinguishable to aught but birds and beasts and some children, were now of the greatest service to his less favoured companion. In this part of their strange pilgrimage it was the boy who took the lead. Flynn, who during the past two days seemed to have fallen into a mood of watchful reserve, nodded his approbation. "This sort of thing's yer best holt, boy," he said. "Men and cities ain't your little game."

At the next stopping-place Clarence had a surprise. They had again entered a town at nightfall, and lodged with another friend of Flynn's in rooms which from vague

sounds appeared to be over a gambling-saloon. Clarence woke late in the morning, and descending into the street to mount for the day's journey, was startled to find that Flynn was not on the other horse, but that a well-dressed and handsome stranger had taken his place. But a laugh, and the familiar command, "Jump up, boy," made him look again. It *was* Flynn, but completely shaven of beard and moustache, closely clipped of hair, and in a fastidiously cut suit of black!

"Then you didn't know me?" said Flynn.

"Not till you spoke," replied Clarence.

"So much the better," said his friend sententiously, as he put spurs to his horse. But as they cantered through the street, Clarence, who had already become accustomed to the stranger's hirsute adornment, felt a little more awe of him. The profile of the mouth and chin now exposed to his sidelong glance was hard and stern, and slightly saturnine. Although unable at the time to identify it with anybody he had ever known, it seemed to the imaginative boy to be vaguely connected with some sad experience. But the eyes were thoughtful and kindly, and the boy later believed that if he had been more familiar with the face he would have loved it better. For it was the last and only day he was to see it—as, late that afternoon, after a dusty ride along more travelled highways, they reached their journey's end.

It was a low-walled house, with red-tiled roofs showing against the dark green of venerable pear and fig trees, and a square courtyard in the centre where they had dismounted. A few words in Spanish from Flynn to one of the lounging peons admitted them to a wooden corridor, and thence to a long low room, which to Clarence's eyes seemed literally piled with books and engravings. Here Flynn hurriedly bade him stay while he sought the host in another part of the building. But Clarence did not miss him; indeed, it may be feared, he forgot even the object of their

journey in the new sensations that suddenly thronged upon him, and the boyish vista of the future that they seemed to open. He was dazed and intoxicated. He had never seen so many books before; he had never conceived of such lovely pictures. And yet in some vague way he thought he must have dreamt of them at some time. He had mounted a chair, and was gazing spell-bound at an engraving of a sea-fight, when he heard Flynn's voice.

His friend had quietly re-entered the room, in company with an oldish, half-foreign-looking man—evidently his relation. With no helping recollection, with no means of comparison beyond a vague idea that his cousin might look like himself, Clarence stood hopelessly before him. He had already made up his mind that he would have to go through the usual cross-questioning in regard to his father and family; he had even forlornly thought of inventing some innocent details to fill out his imperfect and unsatisfactory recollection. But, glancing up, he was surprised to find that his elderly cousin was as embarrassed as he was. Flynn, as usual, masterfully interposed—

"Of course, ye don't remember each other, and thar ain't much that either of you knows about family matters, I reckon," he said grimly; "and as your cousin calls himself Don Juan Robinson," he added to Clarence, "it's just as well that you let 'Jackson Brant' slide. I know him better than you, but you'll get used to him and he to you soon enough. At least, you'd better," he concluded, with his occasional singular gravity.

As he turned as if to leave the room with Clarence's embarrassed relative—much to that gentleman's apparent relief—the boy looked up at the latter and said timidly—

"May I look at those books?"

His cousin stopped and glanced at him with the first expression of interest he had shown.

"Ah, you read; you like books?"

"Yes," said Clarence. As his cousin remained still

looking at him thoughtfully, he added, "My hands are pretty clean, but I can wash them first if you like."

"You may look at them," said Don Juan smilingly; "and as they are old books you can wash your hands afterwards." And, turning to Flynn suddenly with an air of relief, "I tell you what I'll do, I'll teach him Spanish!"

They left the room together, and Clarence turned eagerly to the shelves. They were old books, some indeed very old, queerly bound, and worm-eaten. Some were in foreign languages, but others in clear bold English type, with quaint woodcuts and illustrations. One seemed to be a chronicle of battles and sieges, with pictured representations of combatants spitted with arrows, cleanly lopped off in limb, or toppled over distinctly by visible cannon-shot. He was deep in its perusal when he heard the clatter of horses' hoofs in the courtyard and the voice of Flynn. He ran to the window, and was astonished to see his friend already on horseback taking leave of his host.

For one instant Clarence felt one of those sudden revulsions of feeling common to his age, but which he had always timidly hidden under dogged demeanour. Flynn, his only friend! Flynn, his only boyish confidant! Flynn, his latest hero, was going away and forsaking him without a word of parting! It was true that he had only agreed to take him to his guardian, but still Flynn need not have left him without a word of hope or encouragement! With any one else Clarence would probably have taken refuge in his usual Indian stoicism, but the same feeling that had impelled him to offer Flynn his boyish confidences on their first meeting now overpowered him. He dropped his book, ran out into the corridor, and made his way to the courtyard, just as Flynn galloped out from the arch.

But the boy uttered a despairing shout that reached the rider. He drew rein, wheeled, halted, and sat facing Clarence impatiently. To add to Clarence's embarrassment his cousin had lingered in the corridor, attracted by

the interruption, and a peon, lounging in the archway, obsequiously approached Flynn's bridle rein. But the rider waved him off, and, turning sternly to Clarence, said—

"What's the matter now?"

"Nothing," said Clarence, striving to keep back the hot tears that rose in his eyes. "But you were going away without saying 'good-bye.' You've been very kind to me, and—and—I want to thank you!"

A deep flush crossed Flynn's face. Then glancing suspiciously towards the corridor, he said hurriedly—

"Did *he* send you?"

"No, I came myself! I heard you going."

"All right. Good-bye." He leaned forward as if about to take Clarence's outstretched hand, checked himself suddenly with a grim smile, and taking from his pocket a gold coin handed it to the boy.

Clarence took it, tossed it with a proud gesture to the waiting peon, who caught it thankfully, drew back a step from Flynn, and saying, with white cheeks, "I only wanted to say good-bye," dropped his hot eyes to the ground. But it did not seem to be his own voice that had spoken, nor his own self that had prompted the act.

There was a quick interchange of glances between the departing guest and his late host, in which Flynn's eyes flashed with an odd admiring fire, but when Clarence raised his head again he was gone. And as the boy turned back with a broken heart towards the corridor, his cousin laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"*Muy hidalgamente*, Clarence," he said pleasantly. "Yes, we shall make something of you!"

CHAPTER X.

THEN followed to Clarence three uneventful years. During that interval he learnt that Jackson Brant, or Don Juan Robinson—for the tie of kinship was the least factor in their relations to each other, and after the departure of Flynn was tacitly ignored by both—was more Spanish than American. An early residence in Lower California, marriage with a rich Mexican widow, who dying childless left him sole heir, and some strange restraining idiosyncrasy of temperament, had quite denationalised him. A bookish recluse, somewhat superfastidious towards his own countrymen, the more Clarence knew him the more singular appeared his acquaintance with Flynn, but as he did not exhibit more communicativeness on this point than upon their own kinship, Clarence finally concluded that it was due to the dominant character of his former friend, and thought no more about it. He entered upon the new life at El Refugio with no disturbing past. Quickly adapting himself to the lazy freedom of this *hacienda* existence, he spent the mornings on horseback ranging the hills among his cousin's cattle, and the afternoons and evenings busied among his cousin's books with equally lawless and undisciplined independence. The easygoing Don Juan, it is true, attempted to make good his rash promise to teach the boy Spanish, and actually set him a few tasks; but in a few weeks the quickwitted Clarence acquired such a colloquial proficiency from his casual acquaintance with vaqueros and small traders that he was glad to leave the matter in his young kinsman's hands. Again, by one of those illogical sequences which make a lifelong reputation depend upon a single trivial act, Clarence's social status was settled for ever at El Refugio Rancho by his picturesque diversion of Flynn's parting gift. The grateful peon,

to whom the boy had scornfully tossed the coin, repeated the act, gesture, and spirit of the scene to his companion, and Don Juan's unknown and youthful relation was at once recognised as *hijo de la familia*, and undeniably a hidalgo born and bred. But in the more vivid imagination of feminine El Refugio the incident reached its highest poetic form. "It is true, Mother of God," said Chucha of the Mill; "it was Domingo who himself relates it as it were the Creed. When the American escort has arrived with the young gentleman, this escort, look you, being not of the same quality, he is departing again without a word of permission. Comes to him at this moment my little hidalgo. 'You have yourself forgotten to take from me your demission,' he said. This escort, thinking to make his peace with a mere *muchacho*, gives to him a gold piece of 20 pesos. The little hidalgo has taken it *so*, and with the words, 'Ah! you would make of me your almoner to my cousin's people,' has given it at the moment to Domingo, and with a grace and fire admirable." But it is certain that Clarence's singular simplicity and truthfulness, a faculty of being picturesquely indolent in a way that suggested a dreamy abstraction of mind, rather than any vulgar tendency to bodily ease and comfort, and possibly the fact that he was a good horseman, made him a popular hero at El Refugio. At the end of three years Don Juan found that this inexperienced and apparently idle boy of fourteen knew more of the practical ruling of the ranche than he did himself. Also that this unlettered young rustic had devoured nearly all the books in his library with boyish recklessness of digestion. He found, too, that in spite of his singular independence of action, Clarence was possessed of an invincible loyalty of principle, and that, asking no sentimental affection, and indeed yielding none, he was, without presuming on his relationship, devoted to his cousin's interest. It seemed that from being a glancing ray of sunshine in the house, evasive but never obtrusive,

he had become a daily necessity of comfort and security to his benefactor.

Clarence was, however, astonished when one morning, Don Juan, with the same embarrassed manner he had shown at their first meeting, suddenly asked him "what business he expected to follow." It seemed the more singular, as the speaker, like most abstracted men, had hitherto always studiously ignored the future in their daily intercourse. Yet this might have been either the habit of security or the caution of doubt. Whatever it was, it was some sudden disturbance of Don Juan's equanimity, as disconcerting to himself as it was to Clarence. So conscious was the boy of this, that without replying to his cousin's question, but striving in vain to recall some delinquency of his own, he asked with his usual boyish directness—

"Has anything happened? Have I done anything wrong?"

"No, no," returned Don Juan hurriedly. "But, you see, it's time that you should think of your future—or at least prepare for it. I mean you ought to have some more regular education. You will have to go to school. It's too bad," he added fretfully, with a certain impatient forgetfulness of Clarence's presence, and as if following his one thought. "Just as you are becoming of service to me, and justifying your ridiculous position here—and all this d——d nonsense that's gone before—I mean, of course, Clarence," he interrupted himself, catching sight of the boy's whitening cheek and darkening eye, "I mean, you know—this ridiculousness of my keeping you from school at your age, and trying to teach you myself—don't you see."

"You think it is—ridiculous," repeated Clarence with dogged persistency.

"I mean *I* am ridiculous," said Don Juan hastily—"There! there!—let's say no more about it. To-morrow we'll ride over to San José and see the Father Secretary

at the Jesuits' College about your entering at once. It's a good school, and you'll always be near the rancho!" And so the interview ended.

I am afraid that Clarence's first idea was to run away. There are few experiences more crushing to an ingenuous nature than the sudden revelation of the aspect in which it is regarded by others. The unfortunate Clarence, conscious only of his loyalty to his cousin's interest, and what he believed were the duties of his position, awoke to find that position "ridiculous." In an afternoon's gloomy ride through the lonely hills, and later in the sleepless solitude of his room at night, he concluded that his cousin was right. He would go to school—he would study hard—so hard that in a little—a very little while—he could make a living for himself. He awoke contented. It was the blessing of youth that this resolve and execution seemed as one and the same thing.

The next day found him installed as a pupil and boarder in the college. Don Juan's position and Spanish predilections naturally made his relation acceptable to the faculty; but Clarence could not help perceiving that Father Sobriente, the Principal, regarded him at times with a thoughtful curiosity that made him suspect that his cousin had especially bespoken that attention, and that he occasionally questioned him on his antecedents in a way that made him dread a renewal of the old questioning about his progenitor. For the rest, he was a polished, cultivated man; yet, in the characteristic, material criticism of youth, I am afraid that Clarence chiefly identified him as a priest with large hands, whose soft palms seemed to be cushioned with kindness, and whose equally large feet, encased in extraordinary shapeless shoes of undyed leather, seemed to tread down noiselessly—rather than to ostentatiously crush—the obstacles that beset the path of the young student. In the cloistered galleries of the courtyard Clarence sometimes felt himself borne down by the protecting weight of this

paternal hand; in the midnight silence of the dormitory he fancied he was often conscious of the soft browsing tread and snuffly muffled breathing of his elephantine-footed mentor.

His relations with his schoolfellows, however, were at first far from pleasant. Whether they suspected favouritism; whether they resented that old and unsympathetic manner which sprang from his habits of association with his elders, or whether they rested their objections on the broader grounds of his being a stranger, I do not know, but they presently passed from cruel sneers to physical opposition. It was then found that this gentle and reserved youth had retained certain objectionable, rude, direct, rustic qualities of fist and foot, and that violating all rules and disdaining the pomp and circumstance of schoolboy warfare, of which he knew nothing—he simply thrashed a few of his equals out of hand, with or without ceremony, as the occasion or the insult happened. In this emergency one of the seniors was selected to teach this youthful savage his proper position. A challenge was given and accepted by Clarence with a feverish alacrity that surprised himself as much as his adversary. This was a youth of eighteen, his superior in size and skill. The first blow bathed Clarence's face in his own blood. But the sanguinary chrism, to the alarm of the spectators, effected an instantaneous and unhallowed change in the boy. Instantly closing with his adversary, he sprang at his throat like an animal, and locking his arm around his neck began to strangle him. Blind to the blows that rained upon him, he eventually bore his staggering enemy by sheer onset and surprise to the earth. Amidst the general alarm the strength of half-a-dozen hastily-summoned teachers was necessary to unlock his hold. Even then he struggled to renew the conflict. But his adversary had disappeared, and from that day forward Clarence was never again molested!

Seated before Father Sobriente, in the infirmary, with swollen and bandaged face, and eyes that still seemed to see everything in the murky light of his own blood, Clarence felt the soft weight of the father's hand upon his knee.

"My son," said the priest gently, "you are not of our religion, or I should claim as a right to ask a question of your own heart at this moment. But as to a good friend, Claro, a good friend," he continued, patting the boy's knee, "you will tell me, old Father Sobriente, frankly and truthfully as is your habit, one little thing. Were you not afraid?"

"No," said Clarence doggedly, "I'll lick him again to-morrow."

"Softly, my son! It was not of *him* I speak, but of something more terrible and awful. Were you not afraid of—of"—he paused, and suddenly darting his clear eyes into the very depths of Clarence's soul, added—"of *yourself!*"

The boy started, shuddered, and burst into tears. "So, so," said the priest gently, "we have found our real enemy. Good! Now, by the grace of God, my little warrior, we shall fight *him* and conquer."

Whether Clarence profited by this lesson, or whether this brief exhibition of his quality prevented any repetition of the cause, the episode was soon forgotten. As his schoolfellows had never been his associates or confidants it mattered little to him whether they feared, respected him, or were hypocritically obsequious after the fashion of the weaker. His studies, at all events, profited by this lack of distraction. Already his two years of desultory and omnivorous reading had given him a facile familiarity with many things, which left him utterly free of the timidity, awkwardness, or non-interest of a beginner. His usually reserved manner, which had been lack of expression rather than of conviction, had deceived his tutors. The audacity of a mind that had never been dominated by others, and

owed no allegiance to precedent, made his merely superficial progress something marvellous.

At the end of the first year he was a phenomenal scholar, who seemed capable of anything. Nevertheless, Father Sobriente had an interview with Don Juan, and as a result Clarence was slightly kept back in his studies, a little more freedom from the rules was conceded to him, and he was even encouraged to take some diversion. Of such was the privilege to visit the neighbouring town of Santa Clara unrestricted and unattended. He had always been liberally furnished with pocket-money, for which in his companionless state and Spartan habits he had a singular and unboyish contempt. Nevertheless, he always appeared dressed with scrupulous neatness, and was rather distinguished-looking in his older reserve and melancholy self-reliance.

Lounging one afternoon along the Alameda, a leafy avenue set out by the early Mission Fathers between the village of San José and the convent of Santa Clara, he saw a double file of young girls from the convent approaching on their usual promenade. A view of this procession being the fondest ambition of the San José collegian, and especially interdicted and circumvented by the good Fathers attending the college excursions, Clarence felt for it the profound indifference of a boy who, in the intermediate temperate zone of fifteen years, thinks that he is no longer young and romantic! He was passing them with a careless glance, when a pair of deep violet eyes caught his own under the broad shade of a coquettishly beribboned hat, even as it had once looked at him from the depths of a calico sun-bonnet. Susy! He started and would have spoken, but with a quick little gesture of caution and a meaning glance at the two nuns who walked at the head and foot of the file, she indicated him to follow. He did so at a respectful distance—albeit wondering. A little further on Susy dropped her handkerchief, and was obliged to dart out and run back to the end of the file to recover

it. But she gave another swift glance of her blue eyes as she snatched it up and demurely ran back to her place. The procession passed on, but when Clarence reached the spot where she had paused he saw a three-cornered bit of paper lying in the grass. He was too discreet to pick it up while the girls were still in sight, but continued on; returning to it later. It contained a few words in a school-girl's hand hastily scrawled in pencil, "Come to the south wall near the big pear-tree at six."

Delighted as Clarence felt, he was at the same time embarrassed. He could not understand the necessity of this mysterious rendezvous. He knew that if she was a scholar, she was under certain conventual restraints; but with the privileges of his position and friendship with his teachers, he believed that Father Sobriente would easily procure him an interview with this old playfellow, of whom he had often spoken, and who was, with himself, the sole survivor of his tragical past. And trusted as he was by Sobriente, there was something in this clandestine though innocent rendezvous that went against his loyalty. Nevertheless he kept the appointment, and at the stated time was at the south wall of the convent, over which the gnarled boughs of the distinguishing pear tree hung. Hard by in the wall was a grated wicket door that seemed unused.

Would she appear among the boughs or on the edge of the wall? Either would be like the old Susy! But to his surprise he heard the sound of the key turning in the lock. The grated door suddenly turned on its hinges, and Susy slipped out. Grasping his hand she said, "Let's run, Clarence," and before he could reply, she started off with him at a rapid pace. Down the lane they flew—very much, as it seemed to Clarence's fancy, as they had flown from the old emigrant waggon on the prairie four years before. He glanced at the fluttering, fairy-like figure beside him. She had grown taller and more graceful; she was dressed in exquisite taste, with a minuteness of luxurious detail that

bespoke the spoilt child—but there was the same prodigal outburst of rippling, golden hair down her back and shoulders, violet eyes, capricious little mouth, and the same delicate hands and feet he had remembered. He would have preferred a more deliberate survey, but with a shake of her head and an hysteric little laugh she only said, "Run, Clarence, run," and again darted forward. Arriving at the cross street they turned the corner and halted breathlessly.

"But you're not running away from school, Susy, are you?" said Clarence anxiously.

"Only a little bit. Just enough to get ahead of the other girls," she said, re-arranging her brown curls and tilted hat. "You see, Clarence," she condescended to explain, with a sudden assumption of older superiority, "mother's here at the hotel all this week, and I'm allowed to go home every night, like a day scholar. Only there's three or four other girls that go out at the same time with me and one of the Sisters—and to-day I got ahead of 'em just to see *you*."

"But"—began Clarence.

"Oh, it's all right; the other girls knew it, and helped me. They don't start out for half-an-hour yet, and they'll say I've just run ahead, and when they and the Sister get to the hotel I'll be there already—don't you see?"

"Yes," said Clarence dubiously.

"And we'll go to an ice-cream saloon now, shan't we? There's a nice one near the hotel. I've got some money," she added quickly, as Clarence looked embarrassed.

"So have I," said Clarence, with a faint accession of colour. "Let's go!" She had relinquished his hand to smooth out her frock, and they were walking side by side at a more moderate pace. "But," he continued, clinging to his first idea with masculine persistence, and anxious to assure his companion of his power, of his position, "I'm in the college, and Father Sobriente, who knows your lady

superior, is a good friend of mine, and gives me privileges; and—and—when he knows that you and I used to play together—why, he'll fix it that we may see each other whenever we want."

"Oh, you silly," said Susy, "*what!*—when you're"——

"When I'm *what?*"

The young girl shot a violet blue ray from under her broad hat. "Why—when we're grown up now?" Then with a certain precision, "Why, they're *very* particular about young gentlemen! Why, Clarence, if they suspected that you and I were"——another violet ray from under the hat completed this unfinished sentence.

Pleased and yet confused, Clarence looked straight ahead with deepening colour. "Why," continued Susy, "Mary Rogers, that was walking with me, thought you were ever so old—and a distinguished Spaniard! And I," she said abruptly, "haven't I grown? Tell me, Clarence," with her old appealing impatience, "haven't I grown? Do tell me!"

"Very much," said Clarence.

"And isn't this frock pretty—it's only my second best—but I've a prettier one with lace all down in front; but isn't this one pretty, Clarence, tell me?"

Clarence thought the frock and its fair owner perfection, and said so. Whereat Susy, as if suddenly aware of the presence of passers-by, assumed an air of severe propriety, dropped her hands on her side, and with an affected conscientiousness walked on, a little further from Clarence's side, until they reached the ice-cream saloon.

"Get a table near the back, Clarence," she said, in a confidential whisper, "where they can't see us—and strawberry, you know, for the lemon and vanilla here is just horrid!"

They took their seats in a kind of rustic arbour in the rear of the shop, which gave them the appearance of two youthful, but somewhat over-dressed and over-conscious

shepherds. There was an interval of slight awkwardness, which Susy endeavoured to displace. "There has been," she remarked, with easy conversational lightness, "quite an excitement about our French teacher being changed. The girls—in our class—think it most disgraceful."

And this was all she could say after a separation of four years! Clarence was desperate—but as yet idealess and voiceless. At last, with an effort, over his spoon, he gasped a floating recollection—"Do you still like flapjacks, Susy?"

"Oh, yes," with a laugh, "but we don't have them now."

"And 'Mose'" (a black pointer, who used to yelp when Susy sang), "does he still sing with you?"

"Oh, *he's* been lost ever so long," said Susy composedly; "but I've got a Newfoundland and a spaniel and a black pony," and here, with a rapid inventory of her other personal effects, she drifted into some desultory details of the devotion of her adopted parents, whom she now readily spoke of as "papa" and "mamma," with evidently no disturbing recollection of the dead. From which it appeared that the Peytons were very rich, and, in addition to their possessions in the lower country, owned a ranche in Santa Clara and a house in San Francisco. Like all children, her strongest impressions were the most recent. In the vain hope to lead her back to this material yesterday, he said—

"You remember Jim Hooker?"

"Oh, *he* ran away—when you left! But just think of it! The other day, when papa and I went into a big restaurant in San Francisco, who should be there *waiting* on the table —yes, Clarence—a real waiter—but Jim Hooker! Papa spoke to him; but, of course," with a slight elevation of her pretty chin, "*I* couldn't, you know; fancy—a waiter."

The story of how Jim Hooker had personated him stopped short upon Clarence's lips. He could not bring himself now to add that revelation to the contempt of his

small companion, which, in spite of its *naïveté*, somewhat grated on his sensibilities.

"Clarence," she said, suddenly turning towards him mysteriously, and indicating the shopman and his assistants, "I really believe these people suspect us."

"Of what?" said the practical Clarence.

"Don't be silly! Don't you see how they are staring?"

Clarence was really unable to detect the least curiosity on the part of the shopman, or that any one exhibited the slightest concern in him or his companion. But he felt a return of the embarrassed pleasure he was conscious of a moment before.

"Then you're living with your father?" said Susy, changing the subject.

"You mean my *cousin*," said Clarence, smiling; "you knew my father died long before I ever knew you."

"Yes; that's what *you* used to say, Clarence, but papa says it isn't so." But seeing the boy's wondering eyes fixed on her with a troubled expression, she added quickly, "Oh, then, he *is* your cousin!"

"Well, I think I ought to know," said Clarence, with a smile, that was, however, far from comfortable, and a quick return of his old unpleasant recollections of the Peytons. "Why, I was brought to him by one of his friends." And Clarence gave a rapid boyish summary of his journey from Sacramento, and Flynn's discovery of the letter addressed to Silsbee. But before he had concluded, he was conscious that Susy was by no means interested in these details, nor in the least affected by the passing allusion to her dead father and his relation to Clarence's misadventures. With her rounded chin in her hand, she was slowly examining his face, with a certain mischievous, yet demure abstraction. "I tell you what, Clarence," she said, when he had finished, "you ought to make your cousin get you one of those *sombreros*, and a nice gold-braided *serape*. They'd just suit you! And then—then,

you could ride up and down the Alameda when we are going by."

"But I'm coming to see you at—at your house, and at the Convent," he said eagerly; "Father Sobriente and my cousin will fix it all right."

But Susy shook her head with superior wisdom. "No; they must never know our secret!—neither papa nor mamma, especially mamma. And they mustn't know that we've met again—*after these years!*" It is impossible to describe the deep significance which Susy's blue eyes gave to this expression. After a pause she went on—

"No! We must never meet again, Clarence, unless Mary Rogers helps. She is my best—my *onliest* friend, and older than I; having had trouble herself, and being expressly forbidden to see him again. You can speak to her about Suzette—that's my name now; I was re-christened Suzette Alexandra Peyton by mamma. And now, Clarence," dropping her voice and glancing shyly around the saloon, "you may kiss me just once under my hat, for good-bye." She adroitly slanted her broad-brimmed hat towards the front of the shop, and in its shadow advanced her fresh young cheek to Clarence.

Colouring and laughing, the boy pressed his lips to it twice. Then Susy arose with the faintest affectation of a sigh, shook out her skirt, drew on her gloves with the greatest gravity, and saying, "Don't follow me further than the door—they're coming now," walked with supercilious dignity past the preoccupied proprietor and waiters to the entrance. Here she said, with marked civility, "Good afternoon, Mr. Brant," and tripped away towards the hotel. Clarence lingered for a moment to look after the lithe and elegant little figure, with its shining undulations of hair that fell over the back and shoulders of her white frock like a golden mantle, and then turned away in the opposite direction.

He walked home in a state, as it seemed to him, of

absurd perplexity! There were many reasons why his encounter with Susy should have been of unmixed pleasure. She had remembered him of her own free will, and, in spite of the change in her fortune, had made the first advances. Her doubts about her future interviews had affected him but little; still less, I fear, did he think of the other changes in her character and disposition, for he was of that age when they added only a piquancy and fascination to her—as of one who, in spite of her weakness of nature, was still devoted to him! But he was painfully conscious that this meeting had revived in him all the fears, vague uneasiness, and sense of wrong that had haunted his first boyhood, and which he thought he had buried at El Refugio four years ago. Susy's allusion to his father and the reiteration of Peyton's scepticism awoke in his older intellect the first feeling of suspicion that was compatible with his open nature. Was this recurring reticence and mystery due to any act of his father's? But, looking back upon it in after years, he concluded that the incident of that day was a premonition rather than a recollection.

CHAPTER XI.

When he reached the college the Angelus had long since rung. In the corridor he met one of the Fathers, who, instead of questioning him, returned his salutation with a grave gentleness that struck him. He had turned into Father Sobriente's quiet study with the intention of reporting himself, when he was disturbed to find him in consultation with three or four of the faculty, who seemed to be thrown into some slight confusion by his entrance. Clarence was about to retire hurriedly when Father Sobriente, breaking up the council with a significant glance at the others, called him back. Confused and embarrassed, with

a dread of something impending, the boy tried to avert it by a hurried account of his meeting with Susy, and his hopes of Father Sobriente's counsel and assistance. Taking upon himself the idea of suggesting Susy's escapade, he confessed the fault. The old man gazed into his frank eyes with a thoughtful, half-compassionate smile. "I was just thinking of giving you a holiday with—with Don Juan Robinson." The unusual substitution of this final title for the habitual "your cousin" struck Clarence uneasily. "But we will speak of that later. Sit down, my son, I am not busy. We shall talk a little. Father Pedro says you are getting on fluently with your translations. That is excellent, my son, excellent."

Clarence's face beamed with relief and pleasure. His vague fears began to dissipate.

"And you translate even from dictation! Good! We have an hour to spare, and you shall give to me a specimen of your skill. Eh? Good! I will walk here and dictate to you in my poor English, and you shall sit there and render it to me in your good Spanish. Eh? So we shall amuse and instruct ourselves."

Clarence smiled. These sporadic moments of instruction and admonitions were not unusual to the good father. He cheerfully seated himself at the Padre's table before a blank sheet of paper with a pen in his hand. Father Sobriente paced the apartment with his usual heavy but noiseless tread. To his surprise the good priest, after an exhaustive pinch of snuff, blew his nose, and began, in his most lugubrious style of pulpit exhortation—

"It has been written that the sins of the father shall be visited upon the children, and the unthinking and worldly have sought refuge from this law by declaring it harsh and cruel! Miserable and blind! For do we not see that the wicked man, who in the pride of his power and vainglory is willing to risk punishment to *himself*—and believes it to be courage—must pause before the awful mandate that

condemns an equal suffering to those he loves—which he cannot withhold or suffer for. In the spectacle of these innocents struggling against disgrace, perhaps disease, poverty, or desertions, what avails his haughty, all-defying spirit? Let us imagine, Clarence."

"Sir," said the literal Clarence, pausing in his exercise.

"I mean," continued the priest, with a slight cough, "let the thoughtful man picture a father! A desperate, self-willed man who scorned the laws of God and society—keeping only faith with a miserable subterfuge he called 'honour'—and relying only on his own courage and his knowledge of human weakness! Imagine him cruel and bloody—a gambler by profession, an outlaw among men, an outcast from the Church, voluntarily abandoning friends and family, the wife he should have cherished, the son he should have reared and educated—for the gratification of his deadly passions. Yet imagine that man, suddenly confronted with the thought of that heritage of shame and disgust which he had brought upon his innocent offspring—to whom he cannot give even his own desperate recklessness to sustain its vicarious suffering. What must be the feelings of a parent"——

"Father Sobriente," said Clarence softly.

To the boy's surprise, scarcely had he spoken when the soft protecting palm of the priest was already upon his shoulder, and the snuffy, but kindly upper lip, trembling with some strange emotion, close beside his cheek.

"What is it, Clarence?" he said hurriedly. "Speak, my son, without fear! you would ask"——

"I only wanted to know if 'padre' takes a masculine verb here," said Clarence naïvely.

Father Sobriente blew his nose violently. "Truly—though used for either gender, by the context masculine," he responded gravely. "Ah," he added, leaning over Clarence, and scanning his work hastily. "Good, very good! And now, possibly," he continued, passing his hand

like a damp sponge over his heated brow, "we shall reverse our exercise. I shall deliver to you, in Spanish, what you shall render back in English, eh? And—let us consider—we shall make something more familiar and narrative, eh?"

To this Clarence, somewhat bored by these present solemn abstractions, assented gladly, and took up his pen. Father Sobriente, resuming his noiseless pacing, began—

"On the fertile plains of Guadalajara lived a certain caballero, possessed of flocks and lands, and a wife and son. But, being also possessed of a fiery and roving nature, he did not value them as he did perilous adventure, feats of arms, and sanguinary encounters. To this may be added riotous excesses, gambling, and drunkenness, which in time decreased his patrimony, even as his rebellious and quarrelsome spirit had alienated his family and neighbours. His wife, borne down by shame and sorrow, died while her son was still an infant. In a fit of equal remorse and recklessness the caballero married again within the year. But the new wife was of a temper and bearing as bitter as her consort. Violent quarrels ensued between them, ending in the husband abandoning his wife and son, and leaving St. Louis—I should say Guadalajara—for ever. Joining some adventurers in a foreign land, under an assumed name, he pursued his reckless course until, by one or two acts of outlawry, he made his return to civilisation impossible. The deserted wife and stepmother of his child coldly accepted the situation, forbidding his name to be spoken again in her presence, announced that he was dead, and kept the knowledge of his existence from his own son, whom she placed under the charge of her sister. But the sister managed to secretly communicate with the outlawed father, and, under a pretext, arranged between them, of sending the boy to another relation, actually despatched the innocent child to his unworthy parent. Perhaps stirred by remorse the infamous man"——

"Stop," said Clarence suddenly.

He had thrown down his pen, and was standing erect and rigid before the father.

"You are trying to tell me something, Father Sobriente," he said, with an effort. "Speak out, I implore you. I can stand anything but this mystery. I am no longer a child, I have a right to know all. This that you are telling me is no fable—I see it in your face, Father Sobriente; it is the story of—of"——

"Your father, Clarence," said the priest, in a trembling voice.

The boy drew back with a white face. "My father!" he repeated. "Living or dead?"

"Living—when you first left your home," said the old man hurriedly, seizing Clarence's hand, "for it was he who in the name of your cousin sent for you. Living! yes, while you were here—for it was he who for the past three years stood in the shadow of this assumed cousin Don Juan, and at last sent you to this school. Living, Clarence, yes; but living under a name and reputation that would have blasted you! And now *dead*—dead in Mexico, shot as an insurgent and in a still desperate career! May God have mercy on his soul!"

"Dead!" repeated Clarence, trembling, "only now!"

"The news of the insurrection and his fate came only an hour since," continued the Padre quickly; "his complicity with it and his identity were known only to Don Juan. He would have spared you any knowledge of the truth, even as this dead man would. But I and my brothers thought otherwise. I have broken it to you badly, my son, but forgive me?"

An hysterical laugh broke from Clarence, and the priest recoiled before him. "Forgive *you!* What was this man to me?" he said, with boyish vehemence. "He never *loved* me! He deserted me; he made my life a lie. He never sought me, came near me, or stretched a hand to me that I could take?"

"Hush! hush!" said the priest, with a horrified look, laying his huge hand upon the boy's shoulder and bearing him down to his seat. "You know not what you say. Think—think, Clarence! was there none of all those who have befriended you—who were kind to you in your wanderings—to whom your heart turned unconsciously? Think, Clarence, you yourself have spoken to me of such a one. Let your heart speak again, for his sake—for the sake of the dead."

A gentler light suffused the boy's eyes, and he started. Catching convulsively at his companion's sleeve, he said in an eager boyish whisper, "There was one, a wicked desperate man, whom they all feared—Flynn, who brought me from the mines. Yes, I thought that he was my cousin's loyal friend—more than all the rest; and I told him everything—all, that I never told the man I thought my cousin, or any one, or even you; and I think, I think, Father, I liked him best of all. I thought since it was wrong," he continued with a trembling smile, "for I was foolishly fond even of the way the others feared him—he that I feared not, and who was so kind to me. Yet he, too, left me without a word, and when I would have followed him"—but the boy broke down and buried his face in his hands.

"No, no," said Father Sobriente, with eager persistence, "that was his foolish pride to spare you the knowledge of your kinship with one so feared, and part of the blind and mistaken penance he had laid upon himself. For even at that moment of your boyish indignation he never was so fond of you as then. Yes, my poor boy, this man, to whom God led your wandering feet at Deadman's Gulch—the man who brought you here, and by some secret hold—I know not what—on Don Juan's past, persuaded him to assume to be your relation—this man Flynn, this Jackson Brant the gambler, this Hamilton Brant the outlaw—*was your father!* Ah, yes! Weep on, my son; each tear of love

and forgiveness from thee hath vicarious power to wash away his sin."

With a single sweep of his protecting hand he drew Clarence towards his breast, until the boy slowly sank upon his knees at his feet. Then lifting his eyes towards the ceiling, he said softly in an older tongue, "And *thou*, too, unhappy and perturbed spirit, rest!"

. . . . . .

It was nearly dawn when the good padre wiped the last tears from Clarence's clearer eyes. "And now, my son," he said, with a gentle smile, as he rose to his feet, "let us not forget the living. Although your stepmother has, through her own act, no legal claim upon you, far be it from me to indicate your attitude towards her. Enough that *you* are independent." He turned, and, opening a drawer in his secretaire, took out a bank-book, and placed it in the hands of the wondering boy.

"It was *his* wish, Clarence, that even after his death you should never have to prove your kinship to claim your rights. Taking advantage of the boyish deposit you had left with Mr. Carden at the bank, with his connivance and in your name he added to it, month by month and year by year; Mr. Carden cheerfully accepting the trust and management of the fund. The seed thus sown has produced a thousandfold, Clarence, beyond all expectations. You are not only free, my son, but of yourself and in whatever name you choose—your own master."

"I shall keep my father's name," said the boy simply.

"Amen!" said Father Sobriente.

Here closes the chronicle of Clarence Brant's boyhood. How he sustained his name and independence in after years, and who, of those already mentioned in these pages, helped him to make or mar it, may be a matter for future record.

A Phyllis of the Sierras.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

WHERE the great highway of the Sierras nears the summit, and the pines begin to show sterile reaches of rock and waste in their drawn-up files, there are signs of occasional departures from the main road, as if the weary traveller had at times succumbed to the long ascent, and turned aside for rest and breath again. The tired eyes of many a dusty passenger on the old overland coach have gazed wistfully on those sylvan openings, and imagined recesses of primeval shade and virgin wilderness in their dim perspectives. Had he descended, however, and followed one of these diverging paths, he would have come upon some rude waggon track, or "logslide," leading from a clearing on the slope, or the ominous saw-mill, half hidden in the forest it was slowly decimating. The woodland hush might have been broken by the sound of water passing over some unseen dam in the hollow, or the hiss of escaping steam and throb of an invisible engine in the covert.

Such, at least, was the experience of a young fellow of five-and-twenty, who, knapsack on back and stick in hand, had turned aside from the highway and entered the woods one pleasant afternoon in July. But he was evidently a deliberate pedestrian, and not a recent deposit of the proceeding stage-coach; and, although his stout walking-shoes were covered with dust, he had neither the habitual slouch

and slovenliness of the tramp, nor the hurried fatigue and growing negligence of an involuntary wayfarer. His clothes, which were strong and serviceable, were better fitted for their present usage than the ordinary garments of the Californian travellers, which were too apt to be either above or below their requirements. But perhaps the stranger's greatest claim to originality was the absence of any weapon in his equipment. He carried neither rifle nor gun in his hand, and his narrow leathern belt was empty of either knife or revolver.

A half-mile from the main road, which seemed to him to have dropped out of sight the moment he had left it, he came upon a half-cleared area, where the hastily cut stumps of pines, of irregular height, bore an odd resemblance to the broken columns of some vast and ruined temple. A few fallen shafts, denuded of their bark and tessellated branches, sawn into symmetrical cylinders, lay beside the stumps, and lent themselves to the illusion. But the freshly cut chips, so damp that they still clung in layers to each other as they had fallen from the axe, and the stumps themselves, still wet and viscous from their drained life-blood, were redolent of an odour of youth and freshness.

The young man seated himself on one of the logs, and deeply inhaled the sharp balsamic fragrance—albeit with a slight cough and a later hurried respiration. This, and a certain drawn look about his upper lip, seemed to indicate, in spite of his strength and colour, some pulmonary weakness. He, however, rose after a moment's rest with undiminished energy and cheerfulness, readjusted his knapsack, and began to lightly pick his way across the fallen timber. A few paces on, the muffled whirr of machinery became more audible, with the lazy, monotonous command of "Gee thar," from some unseen ox-driver. Presently, the slow, deliberately swaying heads of a team of oxen emerged from the bushes, followed by the clanking chain of the "skids" of sawn planks, which they were ponderously

dragging, with that ostentatious submissiveness peculiar to their species. They had nearly passed him when there was a sudden hitch in the procession. From where he stood he could see that a projecting plank had struck a pile of chips and become partly imbedded in it. To run to the obstruction and, with a few dexterous strokes and the leverage of his stout stick, dislodge the plank was the work, not only of the moment, but of an evidently energetic hand. The teamster looked back and merely nodded his appreciation, and with a "Gee up! Out of that, now!" the skids moved on.

"Much obliged, there!" said a hearty voice, as if supplementing the teamster's imperfect acknowledgment.

The stranger looked up. The voice came from the open, sashless, shutterless window of a rude building—a mere shell of boards and beams half hidden in the still leafy covert before him. He had completely overlooked it in his approach, even as he had ignored the nearer throbbing of the machinery, which was so violent as to impart a decided tremor to the slight edifice, and to shake the speaker so strongly that he was obliged while speaking to steady himself by the sashless frame of the window at which he stood. He had a face of good-natured and alert intelligence, a master's independence and authority of manner, in spite of his blue jean overalls and flannel shirt.

"Don't mention it," said the traveller, smiling with equal but more deliberate good-humour. Then, seeing that his interlocutor still lingered a hospitable moment in spite of his quick eyes and the jarring impatience of the machinery, he added hesitatingly, "I fancy I've wandered off the track a bit. Do you know a Mr. Bradley—somewhere here?"

His hesitation seemed to be more from some habitual conscientiousness of statement than awkwardness. The man in the window replied, "I'm Bradley."

"Ah! Thank you: I've a letter for you—somewhere.

Here it is." He produced a note from his breast-pocket. Bradley stooped to a sitting posture in the window. "Pitch it up." It was thrown and caught cleverly. Bradley opened it, read it hastily, smiled and nodded, glanced behind him as if to implore further delay from the impatient machinery, leaned perilously from the window, and said—

"Look here! Do you see that silver-fir straight ahead?"

"Yes."

"A little to the left there's a trail. Follow it and skirt along the edge of the canyon until you see my house. Ask for my wife—that's Mrs. Bradley—and give her your letter. Stop!" He drew a carpenter's pencil from his pocket, scrawled two or three words across the open sheet, and tossed it back to the stranger. "See you at tea! Excuse me, Mr. Mainwaring; — we're short-handed — and — the engine"—— But here he disappeared suddenly.

Without glancing at the note again, the stranger quietly replaced it in his pocket, and struck out across the fallen trunks towards the silver-fir. He quickly found the trail indicated by Bradley, although it was faint and apparently worn by a single pair of feet, as a shorter and private cut from some more travelled path. It was well for the stranger that he had a keen eye or he would have lost it; it was equally fortunate that he had a mountaineering instinct, for a sudden profound deepening of the blue mist seen dimly through the leaves before him caused him to slacken his steps. The trail bent abruptly to the right; a gulf fully two thousand feet deep was at his feet! It was the Great Canyon.

At the first glance it seemed so narrow that a rifle-shot could have crossed its tranquil depths; but a second look at the comparative size of the trees on the opposite mountain convinced him of his error. A nearer survey of the abyss also showed him that, instead of its walls being perpendicular, they were made of successive ledges or terraces to the valley below. Yet the air was so still, and the outlines

so clearly cut, that they might have been only the reflections of the mountains around him cast upon the placid mirror of a lake. The spectacle arrested him, as it arrested all men, by some occult power beyond the mere attraction of beauty or magnitude; even the teamster never passed it without the tribute of a stone or broken twig tossed into its immeasurable profundity.

Reluctantly leaving the spot, the stranger turned with the trail that now began to skirt its edge. This was no easy matter, as the undergrowth was very thick, and the foliage dense, to the perilous brink of the precipice. He walked on, however, wondering why Bradley had chosen so circuitous and dangerous a route to his house, which naturally would be some distance back from the canyon. At the end of ten minutes' struggling through the "brush," the trail became vague, and, to all appearance, ended. Had he arrived? The thicket was as dense as before; through the interstices of leaf and spray he could see the blue void of the canyon at his side, and he even fancied that the foliage ahead of him was more symmetrical and less irregular, and was touched here and there with faint bits of colour. To complete his utter mystification, a woman's voice, very fresh, very youthful, and by no means unmusical, rose apparently from the circumambient air. He looked hurriedly to the right and left, and even hopelessly into the trees above him.

"Yes," said the voice, as if renewing a suspended conversation; "it was too funny for anything. There were the two Missouri girls from Skinner's, with their auburn hair ringleted, my dear, like the old 'Books of Beauty'—in white frocks and sashes of an unripe greenish yellow, that puckered up your mouth like persimmons. One of them was speechless from good behaviour, and the other—well! the other was so energetic she called out the figures before the fiddler did, and shrieked to my *vis-à-vis* to dance up to the entire stranger—meaning *me*, if you please."

The voice appeared to come from the foliage that overhung the canyon, and the stranger even fancied he could detect through the shimmering leafy veil something that moved monotonously to and fro Mystified and impatient, he made a hurried stride forward, his foot struck a wooden step, and the next moment the mystery was made clear. He had almost stumbled upon the end of a long verandah that projected over the abyss, before a low, modern dwelling, till then invisible, nestling on its very brink. The symmetrically-trimmed foliage he had noticed were the luxuriant Madeira vines that hid the rude pillars of the verandah; the moving object was a rocking-chair, with its back towards the intruder, that disclosed only the brown hair above, and the white skirts and small slippered feet below, of a seated female figure. In the meantime a second voice from the interior of the house had replied to the figure in the chair, who was evidently the first speaker—

"It must have been very funny; but as long as Jim is always bringing somebody over from the mill, I don't see how *I* can go to those places. You were lucky, my dear, to escape from the new Division Superintendent last night. He was insufferable to Jim, with his talk of his friend the San Francisco millionaire, and to me with his cheap society airs. I do hate a provincial fine gentleman."

The situation was becoming embarrassing to the intruder. At the apparition of the woman, the unaffected and simple directness he had previously shown in his equally abrupt contact with Bradley had fled utterly. Confused by the awkwardness of his arrival, and shocked at the idea of overhearing a private conversation, he stepped hurriedy on the verandah.

"Well? Go on!" said the second voice impatiently. "Well, who else was there? *What* did you say? I don't hear you. What's the matter?"

The seated figure had risen from her chair, and turned a young and pretty face somewhat superciliously towards the

stranger, as she said in a low tone to her unseen auditor, "Hush! there is somebody here!"

The young man came forward with an awkwardness that was more boyish than rustic. His embarrassment was not lessened by the simultaneous entrance from the open door of a second woman, apparently as young as and prettier than the first.

"I trust you'll excuse me for—for—being so wretchedly stupid," he stammered, "but I really thought, you know, that—that—I was following the trail to—to—the front of the house, when I stumbled in—in here."

Long before he had finished, both women, by some simple feminine intuition, were relieved, and even prepossessed, by his voice and manner. They smiled graciously. The later comer pointed to the empty chair. But, with his habit of pertinacious conscientiousness, the stranger continued: "It was regularly stupid, wasn't it?—and I ought to have known better. I should have turned back and gone away when I found out what an ass I was likely to be; but I was—afraid—you know, of alarming you by the noise."

"Won't you sit down?" said the second lady pleasantly.

"Oh, thanks. I've a letter here—I"—— He transferred his stick and hat to his left hand as he felt in his breast-pocket with his right. But the action was so awkward that the stick dropped on the verandah. Both women made a movement to restore it to its embarrassed owner, who, however, quickly anticipated them. "Pray don't mind it," he continued, with accelerated breath and heightened colour. "Ah, here's the letter!" He produced the letter Bradley had returned to him. "It's mine, in fact—that is, I brought it to Mr. Bradley. He said I was to give it to—to—to—Mrs. Bradley." He paused, glancing embarrassedly from the one to the other.

"I'm Mrs. Bradley," said the prettiest one, with a laugh. He handed her the letter. It ran as follows—

"DEAR BRADLEY,—Put Mr. Mainwaring through as far as he wants to go, or hang him up at The Lookout, just as he likes. The Bank's behind him, and his hat's chalked all over the Road. But he don't care much about being on velvet. That ain't his style—and you'll like him. He's somebody's son in England. "B."

Mrs. Bradley glanced simply at the first sentence. "Pray sit down, Mr. Mainwaring," she said gently; "or, rather, let me first introduce my cousin—Miss Macy."

"Thanks," said Mainwaring, with a bow to Miss Macy, "but I—I—I—think," he added conscientiously, "you did not notice that your husband had written something across the paper."

Mrs. Bradley smiled, and glanced at her husband's endorsement—"All right. Wade in." "It's nothing but Jim's slang," she said, with a laugh and a slightly heightened colour. "He ought not to have sent you by that short cut; it's a bother, and even dangerous for a stranger. If you had come directly to *us* by the road, without making your first call at the mill," she added, with a touch of coquetry, "you would have had a pleasanter walk, and seen *us* sooner. I suppose, however, you got off the stage at the mill?"

"I was not on the coach," said Mainwaring, unfastening the strap of his knapsack. "I walked over from Lone Pine Flat."

"Walked!" echoed both women in simultaneous astonishment.

"Yes," returned Mainwaring simply, laying aside his burden and taking the proffered seat. "It's a very fine bit of country."

"Why, it's fifteen miles," said Mrs. Bradley, glancing horror-stricken at her cousin. "How dreadful! And to think Jim could have sent you a horse to Lone Pine. Why, you must be dead!"

"Thanks, I'm all right! I rather enjoyed it, you know."

"But," said Miss Macy, glancing wonderingly at his knapsack, "you must want something, a change—or some refreshment—after fifteen miles."

"Pray don't disturb yourself," said Mainwaring, rising hastily, but not quickly enough to prevent the young girl from slipping past him into the house, whence she rapidly returned with a decanter and glasses.

"Perhaps Mr. Mainwaring would prefer to go into Jim's room and wash his hands and put on a pair of slippers?" said Mrs. Bradley, with gentle concern.

"Thanks, no. I really am not tired. I sent some luggage yesterday by the coach to the Summit Hotel," he said, observing the women's eyes still fixed upon his knapsack. "I dare say I can get them if I want them. I've got a change here," he continued, lifting the knapsack as if with a sudden sense of its incongruity with its surroundings, and depositing it on the end of the verandah.

"Do let it remain where it is," said Mrs. Bradley, greatly amused, "and pray sit still and take some refreshment. You'll make yourself ill after your exertions," she added, with a charming assumption of matronly solicitude.

"But I'm not at all deserving of your sympathy," said Mainwaring, with a laugh. "I'm awfully fond of walking, and my usual constitutional isn't much under this."

"Perhaps you were stronger than you are now," said Mrs. Bradley, gazing at him with a frank curiosity that, however, brought a faint deepening of colour to his cheek.

"I dare say you're right," he said suddenly, with an apologetic smile. "I quite forgot that I'm a sort of an invalid, you know, travelling for my health. I'm not very strong here," he added, lightly tapping his chest, that now, relieved of the bands of his knapsack, appeared somewhat thin and hollow in spite of his broad shoulders. His voice, too, had become less clear and distinct.

Mrs. Bradley, who was still watching him, here rose potentially. "You ought to take more care of yourself," she said. "You should begin by eating this biscuit, drinking that glass of whisky, and making yourself more comfortable in Jim's room until we can get the spare room fixed a little."

"But I am not to be sent to bed—am I?" asked Mainwaring, in half-real, half-amused consternation.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Mrs. Bradley, with playful precision. "But for the present we'll let you off with a good wash and a nap afterwards in that rocking-chair, while my cousin and I make some little domestic preparations. You see," she added with a certain proud humility, "we've got only one servant—a Chinaman, and there are many things we can't leave to him."

The colour again rose on Mainwaring's cheek, but he had tact enough to reflect that any protest or hesitation on his part at that moment would only increase the difficulties of his gentle entertainers. He allowed himself to be ushered into the house by Mrs. Bradley, and shown to her husband's room, without perceiving that Miss Macy had availed herself of his absence to run to the end of the verandah, mischievously try to lift the discarded knapsack to her own pretty shoulder, but, failing, heroically stagger with it into the passage and softly deposit it at his door. This done, she pantingly rejoined her cousin in the kitchen.

"Well," said Mrs. Bradley emphatically. "*Did* you ever? Walking fifteen miles for pleasure—and with such lungs!"

"And that knapsack!" added Louise Macy, pointing to the mark in her little palm where the strap had imbedded itself in the soft flesh.

"He's nice, though; isn't he?" said Mrs. Bradley tentatively.

"Yes," said Miss Macy; "he isn't, certainly, one of those provincial fine gentlemen you object to. But *did* you see

his shoes? I suppose they make the miles go quickly, or seem to measure less by comparison."

"They're probably more serviceable than those high-heeled things that Captain Greyson hops about in."

"But the Captain always rides—and rides very well—you know," said Louise reflectively. There was a moment's pause.

"I suppose Jim will tell us all about him," said Mrs. Bradley, dismissing the subject, as she turned her sleeves back over her white arms, preparatory to grappling certain culinary difficulties.

"Jim," observed Miss Macy shortly, "in my opinion, knows nothing more than his note says. That's like Jim."

"There's nothing more to know, really," said Mrs. Bradley, with a superior air. "He's undoubtedly the son of some Englishman of fortune, sent out here for his health."

"Hush!"

Miss Macy had heard a step in the passage. It halted at last, half irresolutely, before the open door of the kitchen, and the stranger appeared with an embarrassed air. But in his brief absence he seemed to have completely groomed himself, and stood there, the impersonation of close-cropped, clean, and wholesome English young manhood. The two women appreciated it with cat-like fastidiousness.

"I beg your pardon; but really you're going to let a fellow do something for you," he said, "just to keep him from looking like a fool. I really can do no end of things, you know, if you'll try me. I've done some camping-out, and can cook as well as the next man."

The two women made a movement of smiling remonstrance, half coquettish, and half superior, until Mrs. Bradley, becoming conscious of her bare arms and the stranger's wandering eyes, coloured faintly, and said with more decision—

"Certainly not. You'd only be in the way. Besides,

you need rest more than we do. Put yourself in the rocking-chair, in the verandah, and go to sleep until Mr. Bradley comes."

Mainwaring saw that she was serious, and withdrew, a little ashamed at the familiarity into which his boyishness had betrayed him. But he had scarcely seated himself in the rocking-chair before Miss Macy appeared, carrying with both hands a large tin basin of unshelled peas.

"There," she said pantingly, placing her burden in his lap, "if you really want to help, there's something to do that isn't very fatiguing. You may shell these peas."

"*Shell* them—I beg pardon, but how?" he asked, with smiling earnestness.

"How? Why, I'll show you—look."

She frankly stepped beside him, so close that her full-skirted dress half encompassed him and the basin in a delicious confusion, and, leaning over his lap, with her left hand picked up a pea-cod, which, with a single movement of her charming little right thumb, she broke at the end, and stripped the green shallow of its tiny treasures.

He watched her with smiling eyes; her own, looking down on him, were very bright and luminous. "There; that's easy enough," she said, and turned away.

"But—one moment, Miss—Miss?"——

"Macy," said Louise.

"Where am I to put the shells?"

"Oh! throw them down there—there's room enough."

She was pointing to the canyon below. The verandah actually projected over its brink, and seemed to hang in mid-air above it. Mainwaring almost mechanically threw his arm out to catch the incautious girl, who had stepped heedlessly to its extreme edge.

"How odd! Don't you find it rather dangerous here?" he could not help saying. "I mean—you might have had a railing that wouldn't intercept the view, and yet be safe?"

"It's a fancy of Mr. Bradley's," returned the young girl

carelessly. "It's all like this. The house was built on a ledge against the side of the precipice, and the road suddenly drops down to it."

"It's tremendously pretty, all the same, you know," said the young man thoughtfully, gazing, however, at the girl's rounded chin above him.

"Yes," she replied curtly. "But this isn't working. I must go back to Jenny. You can shell the peas until Mr. Bradley comes home. He won't be long."

She turned away, and re-entered the house. Without knowing why, he thought her withdrawal abrupt, and he was again feeling his ready colour rise with the suspicion of either having been betrayed by the young girl's innocent fearlessness into some unpardonable familiarity, which she had quietly resented, or of feeling an ease and freedom in the company of these two women that were inconsistent with respect, and should be restrained.

He, however, began to apply himself to the task given to him with his usual conscientiousness of duty, and presently acquired a certain manual dexterity in the operation. It was "good fun" to throw the cast-off husks into the mighty unfathomable void before him and watch them linger with suspended gravity in mid-air for a moment—apparently motionless—until they either lost themselves, a mere vanishing black spot in the thin ether, or slid suddenly at a sharp angle into unknown shadow. How deuced odd for him to be sitting here in this fashion! It would be something to talk of hereafter, and yet—he stopped—it was not at all in the line of that characteristic adventure, uncivilised novelty, and barbarous freedom which for the last month he had sought and experienced. It was not at all like his meeting with the grizzly last week while wandering in a lonely canyon; not a bit in the line of his chance acquaintance with that notorious ruffian, Spanish Jack, or his witnessing with his own eyes that actual lynching affair at Angels. No! Nor was it at all

characteristic, according to his previous ideas of frontier rural seclusion—as for instance the Pike County cabin of the family where he stayed one night, and where the handsome daughter asked him what his Christian name was. No! These two young women were very unlike her; they seemed really quite the equals of his family and friends in England—perhaps more attractive—and yet, yes it was this very attractiveness that alarmed his inbred social conservatism regarding women. With a man it was very different; that alert, active, intelligent husband, instinct with the throbbing life of his saw-mill, creator and worker in one, challenged his unqualified trust and admiration.

He had become conscious for the last minute or two of thinking rapidly and becoming feverishly excited; of breathing with greater difficulty, and a renewed tendency to cough. The tendency increased until he instinctively put aside the pan from his lap and half rose. But even that slight exertion brought on an accession of coughing. He put his handkerchief to his lips, partly to keep the sound from disturbing the women in the kitchen, partly because of a certain significant taste in his mouth which he unpleasantly remembered. When he removed the handkerchief it was, as he expected, spotted with blood. He turned quickly and re-entered the house softly, regaining the bedroom without attracting attention. An increasing faintness here obliged him to lie down on the bed until it should pass.

Everything was quiet. He hoped they would not discover his absence from the verandah until he was better; it was deucedly awkward that he should have had this attack just now—and after he had made so light of his previous exertions. They would think him an effeminate fraud, these two bright, active women and that alert, energetic man. A faint colour came into his cheek at the idea, and an uneasy sense that he had been in some way foolishly imprudent about his health. Again, they

might be alarmed at missing him from the verandah; perhaps he had better have remained there; perhaps he ought to tell them that he had concluded to take their advice and lie down. He tried to rise, but the deep blue chasm before the window seemed to be swelling up to meet him, the bed slowly sinking into its oblivious profundity. He knew no more.

He came to with the smell and taste of some powerful volatile spirit, and the vague vision of Mr. Bradley still standing at the window of the mill and vibrating with the machinery; this changed presently to a pleasant lassitude and lazy curiosity as he perceived Mr. Bradley smile and apparently slip from the window of the mill to his bedside.

"You're all right now," said Bradley cheerfully.

He was feeling Mainwaring's pulse. Had he really been ill, and was Bradley a doctor?

Bradley evidently saw what was passing in his mind. "Don't be alarmed," he said gaily. "I'm not a doctor, but I practise a little medicine and surgery on account of the men at the mill, and accidents, you know. You're all right now; you've lost a little blood; but in a couple of weeks in this air we'll have that tubercle healed, and you'll be as right as a trivet."

"In a couple of weeks!" echoed Mainwaring, in faint astonishment. "Why, I leave here to-morrow."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Bradley, with smiling peremptoriness, suddenly slipping out from behind her husband. "Everything is all perfectly arranged. Jim has sent off messengers to your friends, so that if you can't come to them they can come to you. You see, you can't help yourself? If you *will* walk fifteen miles with such lungs, and then frighten people to death, you must abide by the consequences."

"You see, the old lady has fixed you," said Bradley, smiling, "and she's the master here. Come, Mainwaring,

you can send any other message you like, and have who and what you want here; but *here* you must stop for awhile."

"But did I frighten you really?" stammered Mainwaring faintly to Mrs. Bradley.

"Frighten us!" said Mrs. Bradley. "Well, look there!"

She pointed to the window, which commanded a view of the verandah. Miss Macy had dropped into the vacant chair, with her little feet stretched out before her, her cheeks burning with heat and fire, her eyes partly closed, her straw hat hanging by a ribbon round her neck, her brown hair clinging to her ears and forehead in damp tendrils, and an enormous palm-leaf fan in each hand violently playing upon this charming picture of exhaustion and abandonment.

"She came tearing down to the mill, barebacked on our half-broken mustang, about half-an-hour ago, to call me 'to help you,'" explained Bradley. "Heaven knows how she managed to do it!"

CHAPTER II.

THE medication of the woods was not over-estimated by Bradley. There was surely some occult healing property in that vast reservoir of balmy and resinous odours over which The Lookout beetled and clung, and from which at times the pure exhalations of the terraced valley seemed to rise. Under its remedial influence and a conscientious adherence to the rules of absolute rest and repose laid down for him, Mainwaring had no return of the hæmorrhage. The nearest professional medical authority, hastily summoned, saw no reason for changing or for supplementing Bradley's intelligent and simple treatment, although astounded that the patient had been under no more radical

or systematic cure than travel and exercise. The women especially were amazed that Mainwaring had taken "nothing for it," in their habitual experience of an unfettered pill-and-elixir consuming democracy. In their knowledge of the thousand "panaceas" that filled the shelves of the General Store, this singular abstention of their guest seemed to indicate a national peculiarity.

His bed was moved beside the low window, from which he could not only view the verandah, but converse at times with its occupants, and even listen to the book which Miss Macy, seated without, read aloud to him. In the evening, Bradley would linger by his couch until late, beguiling the tedium of his convalescence with characteristic stories and information which he thought might please the invalid. For Mainwaring, who had been early struck with Bradley's ready and cultivated intelligence, ended by shyly avoiding the discussion of more serious topics, partly because Bradley impressed him with a suspicion of his own inferiority, and partly because Mainwaring questioned the taste of Bradley's apparent exhibition of his manifest superiority. He learned accidentally that this millowner and backwoodsman was a college-bred man; but the practical application of that education to the ordinary affairs of life was new to the young Englishman's traditions, and grated a little harshly on his feelings. He would have been quite content if Bradley had, like himself and fellows he knew, undervalued his training, and kept his gifts conservatively impractical. The knowledge also that his host's education naturally came from some provincial institution unlike Oxford and Cambridge, may have unconsciously affected his general estimate. I say unconsciously, for his strict conscientiousness would have rejected any such formal proposition.

Another trifle annoyed him. He could not help noticing also that, although Bradley's manner and sympathy were confidential and almost brotherly, he never made any

allusion to Mainwaring's own family or connections, and, in fact, gave no indication of what he believed was the national curiosity in regard to strangers. Somewhat embarrassed by this indifference, Mainwaring made the occasion of writing some letters home an opportunity for laughingly alluding to the fact that he had made his mother and his sisters fully aware of the great debt they owed the household of The Lookout.

"They'll probably all send you a round robin of thanks, except, perhaps, my next brother, Bob." Bradley contented himself with a gesture of general deprecation, and did not ask *why* Mainwaring's young brother should contemplate his death with satisfaction. Nevertheless, some time afterwards Miss Macy remarked that it seemed hard that the happiness of one member of a family should depend upon a calamity to another. "As for instance?" asked Mainwaring, who had already forgotten the circumstance. "Why, if you had died, and your younger brother succeeded to the baronetcy, and become Sir Robert Mainwaring," responded Miss Macy, with precision. This was the first and only allusion to his family and prospective rank. On the other hand he had—through naïve and boyish inquiries, which seemed to amuse his entertainers—acquired, as he believed, a full knowledge of the history and antecedents of the Bradley household. He knew how Bradley had brought his young wife and her cousin to California, and abandoned a lucrative law practice in San Francisco to take possession of this mountain mill and woodland, which he had acquired through some professional service.

"Then you are a barrister, really?" said Mainwaring gravely.

Bradley laughed. "I'm afraid I've had more practice—though not as lucrative a one—as surgeon or doctor."

"But you're regularly on the rolls, you know; you're entered as counsel, and all that sort of thing?" continued Mainwaring, with great seriousness.

"Well, yes," replied Bradley, much amused. "I'm afraid I must plead guilty to that."

"It's not a bad sort of thing," said Mainwaring naïvely, ignoring Bradley's amusement. "I've got a cousin who's gone in for the law. Got out of the army to do it—too. He's a sharp fellow."

"Then you *do* allow a man to try many trades—over there," said Miss Macy demurely.

"Yes, sometimes," said Mainwaring graciously, but by no means certain that the case was at all analogous.

Nevertheless, as if relieved of certain doubts of the conventional quality of his host's attainments, he now gave himself up to a very hearty and honest admiration of Bradley. "You know it's awfully kind of him to talk to a fellow like me, who just pulled through, and never got any prizes at Oxford, and don't understand the half of these things," he remarked confidentially to Mrs. Bradley. "He knows more about the things we used to go in for at Oxford than lots of our men, and he's never been there. He's uncommonly clever."

"Jim was always very brilliant," returned Mrs. Bradley indifferently, and with more than even conventionally polite wifely deprecation; "I wish he were more practical."

"Practical! Oh, I say, Mrs. Bradley! Why, a fellow that can go in among a lot of workmen and tell them just what to do—an all-round chap that can be independent of his valet, his doctor, and his—banker! By Jove—*that's* practical!"

"I mean," said Mrs. Bradley coldly, "that there are some things that a gentleman ought not to be practical about nor independent of. Mr. Bradley would have done better to have used his talents in some more legitimate and established way."

Mainwaring looked at her in genuine surprise. To his inexperienced observation Bradley's intelligent energy, and, above all, his originality, ought to have been priceless in

the eyes of his wife—the American female of his species. He felt that slight shock which most loyal or logical men feel when first brought face to face with the easy disloyalty and incomprehensible logic of the feminine affections. Here was a fellow, by Jove, that any woman ought to be proud of, and—and—he stopped blankly. He wondered if Miss Macy sympathised with her cousin.

Howbeit, this did not affect the charm of their idyllic life at The Lookout. The precipice over which they hung was as charming as ever in its poetic illusions of space and depth and colour; the isolation of their comfortable existence in the tasteful yet audacious habitation, the pleasant routine of daily tasks and amusements, all tended to make the enforced quiet and inaction of his convalescence a lazy recreation. He was really improving; more than that, he was conscious of a certain satisfaction in this passive observation of novelty that was healthier and perhaps *truer* than his previous passion for adventure and that febrile desire for change and excitement which he now felt was a part of his disease. Nor were incident and variety entirely absent from this tranquil experience. He was one day astonished at being presented by Bradley with copies of the latest English newspapers, procured from Sacramento, and he equally astonished his host, after profusely thanking him, by only listlessly glancing at their columns. He estopped a proposed visit from one of his influential countrymen; in the absence of his fair entertainers at their domestic duties, he extracted infinite satisfaction from Foo-Yup, the Chinese servant, who was particularly detached for his service. From his invalid coign of vantage at the window he was observant of all that passed upon the verandah, that *al fresco* audience-room of The Lookout, and he was good-humouredly conscious that a great many eccentric and peculiar visitors were invariably dragged thither by Miss Macy, and goaded into characteristic exhibition within sight and hearing of her guest, with a too evident view,

under the ostentatious excuse of extending his knowledge of national character, of mischievously shocking him. "When you are strong enough to stand Captain Gashweiler's opinions of the Established Church and Chinamen," said Miss Macy, after one of those revelations, "I'll get Jim to bring him here, for really he swears so outrageously that even in the broadest interests of international understanding and goodwill neither Mrs. Bradley nor myself could be present."

On another occasion she provokingly lingered before his window for a moment with a rifle slung jauntily over her shoulder. "If you hear a shot or two don't excite yourself, and believe we're having a lynching case in the woods. It will be only me. There's some creature—confess, you expected me to say 'critter'—hanging round the barn. It may be a bear. Good-bye." She missed the creature—which happened to be really a bear—much to Mainwaring's illogical satisfaction. "I wonder why," he reflected, with vague uneasiness, "she doesn't leave all that sort of thing to girls like that tow-headed girl at the blacksmith's."

It chanced, however, that this blacksmith's tow-headed daughter, who, it may be incidentally remarked, had the additional eccentricities of large black eyes and large white teeth, came to the fore in quite another fashion. It was when, Mainwaring being able to leave his room and join the family board, Mrs. Bradley found it necessary to enlarge her domestic service, and arranged with their nearest neighbour, the blacksmith, to allow his daughter to come to The Lookout for a few days to "do the chores" and assist in the housekeeping, as she had on previous occasions. The day of her advent Bradley entered Mainwaring's room, and, closing the door mysteriously, fixed his blue eyes, kindling with mischief, on the young Englishman.

"You are aware, my dear boy," he began with affected gravity, "that you are now living in a land of liberty where mere artificial distinctions are not known, and where

Freedom from her mountain heights generally levels all social positions. I think you have graciously admitted that fact."

"I know I've been taking a tremendous lot of freedom with you and yours, old man, and it's a deuced shame," interrupted Mainwaring, with a faint smile.

"And that nowhere," continued Bradley, with immovable features, "does equality exist as perfectly as above yonder unfathomable abyss, where you have also, doubtless, observed the American eagle proudly soars and screams defiance."

"Then that was the fellow that kept me awake this morning, and made me wonder if I was strong enough to hold a gun again."

"That wouldn't have settled the matter," continued Bradley imperturbably. "The case is simply this: Miss Minty Sharpe, that blacksmith's daughter, has once or twice consented, for a slight emolument, to assist in our domestic service for a day or two, and she comes back again to-day. Now, under the ægis of that noble bird whom your national instincts tempt you to destroy, she has on all previous occasions taken her meals with us, at the same table, on terms of perfect equality. She will naturally expect to do the same now. Mrs. Bradley thought it proper, therefore, to warn you, that, in case your health was not quite equal to this democratic simplicity, you could still dine in your room."

"It would be great fun—if Miss Sharpe won't object to my presence."

"But it must not be 'great fun,'" returned Bradley, more seriously; "for Miss Minty's perception of humour is probably as keen as yours, and she would be quick to notice it. And, so far from having any objection to you, I am inclined to think that we owe her consent to come to her desire of making your acquaintance."

"She will find my conduct most exemplary," said Mainwaring earnestly.

"Let us hope so," concluded Bradley, with unabated gravity. "And, now that you have consented, let me add, from my own experience, that Miss Minty's lemon-pies alone are worthy of any concession."

The dinner-hour came. Mainwaring, a little pale and interesting, leaning on the arm of Bradley, crossed the hall, and for the first time entered the dining-room of the house where he had lodged for three weeks. It was a bright, cheerful apartment, giving upon the laurels of the rocky hillside, and permeated, like the rest of the house, with the wholesome spice of the valley—an odour that, in its pure desiccating property, seemed to obliterate all flavour of alien human habitation, and even to dominate and etherealise the appetising smell of the viands before them. The bare, shining, planed, boarded walls appeared to resent any decoration that might have savoured of dust, decay, or moisture. The four large windows and long, open door, set in scanty strips of the plainest, spotless muslin, framed in themselves pictures of woods and rock and sky of limitless depth, colour, and distance, that made all other adornment impertinent. Nature, invading the room at every opening, had banished Art from those neutral walls.

"It's like a picnic, with comfort," said Mainwaring, glancing round him with boyish appreciation. Miss Minty was not yet there; the Chinaman was alone in attendance. Mainwaring could not help whispering, half mischievously, to Louise, "You draw the line at Chinamen, I suppose?"

"*We* don't, but *he* does," answered the young girl. "He considers us his social inferiors. But—hush!"

Minty Sharpe had just entered the room, and was advancing with smiling confidence towards the table. Mainwaring was a little startled; he had seen Minty in a holland sun-bonnet and turned-up skirt crossing the verandah only a moment before; in the brief instant between the dishing-up of dinner and its actual announcement she had

managed to change her dress, put on a clean collar, cuffs, and a large jet brooch, and apply some odorous unguent to her rebellious hair. Her face, guiltless of powder or cold cream, was still shining with the healthy perspiration of her last labours as she promptly took the vacant chair beside Mainwaring.

"Don't mind me, folks," she said cheerfully, resting her plump elbow on the table, and addressing the company generally, but gazing with frank curiosity into the face of the young man at her side. "It was a keen jump, I tell yer, to get out of my old duds inter these, and look decent inside o' five minutes. But I reckon I ain't kept yer waitin' long—least of all this yer sick stranger. But you're looking pearter than you did. You're wonderin' like ez not where I ever saw ye before?" she continued, laughing. "Well, I'll tell you. Last week! I'd kem over yer on a chance of seein' Jenny Bradley, and while I was meanderin' down the verandah I saw you lyin' back in your chair by the window drowned in sleep, like a baby. Lordy! I mout hev won a pair o' gloves, but I reckoned you were Loo's game, and not mine."

The slightly-constrained laugh which went round the table after Miss Minty's speech was due quite as much to the faint flush that had accented Mainwaring's own smile as to the embarrassing remark itself. Mrs. Bradley and Miss Macy exchanged rapid glances. Bradley, who alone retained his composure, with a slight flicker of amusement in the corner of his eye and nostril, said quickly: "You see, Mainwaring, how Nature stands ready to help your convalescence at every turn. If Miss Minty had only followed up her healing opportunity, your cure would have been complete."

"Ye mout hev left some o' that pretty talk for *him* to say," said Minty, taking up her knife and fork with a slight shrug, "and you needn't call me *Miss* Minty either, jest because there's kempeny present."

"I hope you won't look upon me as company, Minty, or I shall be obliged to call you 'Miss' too," said Mainwaring, unexpectedly regaining his usual frankness.

Bradley's face brightened; Miss Minty raised her black eyes from her plate with still broader appreciation.

"There's nothin' mean about that," she said, showing her white teeth. "Well, what's *your* first name?"

"Not as pretty as yours, I'm afraid. It's Frank."

"No, it ain't, it's Francis! You reckon to be Sir Francis some day," she said gravely. "You can't play any Frank off on me; you wouldn't do it on *her*," she added, indicating Louise with her elbow.

A momentous silence followed. The particular form that Minty's vulgarity had taken had not been anticipated by the two other women. They had not unreasonably expected some original audacity or *gaucherie* from the blacksmith's daughter, which might astonish yet amuse their guest, and condone for the situation forced upon them. But they were not prepared for a playfulness that involved themselves in a ridiculous indiscretion. Mrs. Bradley's eyes sought her husband's meaningly; Louise's pretty mouth hardened. Luckily, the cheerful cause of it suddenly jumped up from the table, and saying that the stranger was starving, insisted upon bringing a dish from the other side, and helping him herself plentifully. Mainwaring rose gallantly to take the dish from her hand, a slight scuffle ensued, which ended in the young man being forced down in his chair by the pressure of Minty's strong plump hand on his shoulder. "There," she said, "ye kin mind your dinner now, and I reckon we'll give the others a chance to chip into the conversation," and at once applied herself to the plate before her.

The conversation presently became general, with the exception that Minty, more or less engrossed by professional anxiety in the quality of the dinner, and occasional hurried visits to the kitchen, briefly answered the few polite remarks

which Mainwaring felt called upon to address to her. Nevertheless he was conscious, *malgré* her rallying allusion to Miss Macy, that he felt none of the vague yet half-pleasant anxiety with which Louise was beginning to inspire him. He felt at ease in Minty's presence, and believed, rightly or wrongly, that she understood him as well as he understood her. And there were certainly points in common between his two hostesses and their humbler though proud dependent. The social evolution of Mrs. Bradley and Louise Macy from some previous Minty was neither remote nor complete; the self-sufficient independence, ease, and quiet self-assertion were alike in each. The superior position was still too recent and accidental for either to resent or criticise qualities that were common to both. At least, this was what he thought when not abandoning himself to the gratification of a convalescent appetite; to the presence of two pretty women, the sympathy of a genial friend, the healthy intoxication of the white sunlight that glanced upon the pine walls, the views that mirrored themselves in the open windows, and the pure atmosphere in which The Lookout seemed to swim. Wandering breezes of balm and spice lightly stirred the flowers on the table, and seemed to fan his hair and forehead with softly healing breath. Looking up in an interval of silence, he caught Bradley's grey eyes fixed upon him with a subdued light of amusement and affection, as of an elder brother regarding a schoolboy's boisterous appetite at some feast. Mainwaring laid down his knife and fork with a laughing colour, touched equally by Bradley's fraternal kindliness and the consciousness of his gastronomical powers.

"Hang it, Bradley, look here! I know my appetite's disgraceful; but what can a fellow do? In such air, with such viands and such company! It's like the bees getting drunk on Hybla and Hymettus, you know. I'm not responsible!"

"It's the first square meal I believe you've really eaten in six months," said Bradley gravely. "I can't understand why your doctor allowed you to run down so dreadfully."

"I reckon you aint as keerful of yourself, you Britishers, ez us," said Minty. "Lordy! Why there's Pop invests in more patent medicines in one day than you have in two weeks, and he'd make two of you. Mebbe your folks don't look after you enough."

"I'm a splendid advertisement of what *your* care and your medicines have done," said Mainwaring, gratefully, to Mrs. Bradley; "and if you ever want to set up a 'Cure' here, I'm ready with a ten-page testimonial."

"Have a care, Mainwaring," said Bradley, laughing, "that the ladies don't take you at your word. Louise and Jenny have been doing their best for the last year to get me to accept a flattering offer from a Sacramento firm to put up an Hotel for Tourists on the site of The Lookout. Why, I believe that they have already secretly in their hearts concocted a flaming prospectus of 'Unrivalled Scenery' and 'Health-giving Air,' and are looking forward to Saturday night hops on the piazza."

"Have you really though?" said Mainwaring, gazing from the one to the other.

"We should certainly see more company than we do now, and feel a little less out of the world," said Louise candidly. "There are no neighbours here—I mean the people at the Summit are not," she added, with a slight glance towards Minty.

"And Mr. Bradley would find it more profitable—not to say more suitable to a man of his position—than this wretched saw-mill and timber business," said Mrs. Bradley decidedly.

Mainwaring was astounded; was it possible they considered it more dignified for a lawyer to keep an hotel than a saw-mill? Bradley, as if answering what was passing in his mind, said mischievously, "I'm not sure, exactly, what

my position is, my dear, and I'm afraid I've declined the hotel on business principles. But, by the way, Mainwaring, I found a letter at the mill this morning from Mr. Richardson. He is about to pay us the distinguished honour of visiting The Lookout, solely on your account, my dear fellow."

"But I wrote him that I was much better, and it wasn't necessary for him to come," said Mainwaring.

"He makes an excuse of some law business with me. I suppose he considers the mere fact of his taking the trouble to come here, all the way from San Francisco, a sufficient honour to justify any absence of formal invitation," said Bradley, smiling.

"But he's only—I mean he's my father's banker," said Mainwaring, correcting himself, "and you don't keep an hotel."

"Not yet," returned Bradley, with a mischievous glance at the two women, "but The Lookout is elastic, and I dare say we can manage to put him up."

A silence ensued. It seemed as if some shadow, or momentary darkening of the brilliant atmosphere; some film across the mirror-like expanse of the open windows, or misty dimming of their wholesome light, had arisen to their elevation. Mainwaring felt that he was looking forward with unreasoning indignation and uneasiness to this impending interruption of their idyllic life; Mrs. Bradley and Louise, who had become a little more constrained and formal under Minty's freedom, were less sympathetic; even the irrepressible Minty appeared absorbed in the responsibilities of the dinner.

Bradley alone preserved his usual patient good-humour. "We'll take our coffee on the verandah, and the ladies will join us by-and-by, Mainwaring; besides, I don't know that I can allow you, as an invalid, to go entirely through Minty's bountiful *menu* at present. You shall have the sweets another time."

When they were alone on the verandah, he said, between the puffs of his black briarwood pipe—a pet aversion of Mrs. Bradley—"I wonder how Richardson will accept Minty!"

"If *I* can, I think he *must*," returned Mainwaring drily. "By Jove, it will be great fun to see him; but"—he stopped and hesitated—"I don't know about the ladies. I don't think, you know, that they'll stand Minty again before another stranger."

Bradley glanced quickly at the young man; their eyes met, and they both joined in a superior and, I fear, disloyal smile. After a pause Bradley, as if in a spirit of further confidence, took his pipe from his mouth and pointed to the blue abyss before them.

"Look at that profundity, Mainwaring, and think of it ever being bullied and over-awed by a long verandah-load of gaping, patronising tourists, and the idiotic flirting females of their species. Think of a lot of over-dressed creatures flouting those severe outlines and deep-toned distances with frippery and garishness. You know how you have been lulled to sleep by that delicious indefinite far-off murmur of the canyon at night—think of it being broken by a crazy waltz or a monotonous German—by the clatter of waiters and the pop of champagne corks. And yet, by thunder, those women are capable of liking both and finding no discord in them!"

"Dancing ain't half bad, you know," said Mainwaring conscientiously, "if a chap's got the wind to do it; and all Americans, especially the women, dance better than we do. But I say, Bradley, to hear you talk, a fellow wouldn't suspect you were as big a Vandal as anybody, with a beastly howling saw-mill in the heart of the primeval forest. By Jove, you quite bowled me over that first day we met, when you popped your head out of that *delirium tremens* shaking mill, like the very genius of destructive improvement."

"But that was *fighting* Nature, not patronising her; and

it's a business that pays. That reminds me that I must go back to it," said Bradley, rising and knocking the ashes from his pipe.

"Not *after* dinner, surely!" said Mainwaring, in surprise. "Come now, that's too much like the bolting Yankee of the travellers' books."

"There's a heavy run to get through to-night. We're working against time," returned Bradley. Even while speaking he had vanished within the house, returned quickly—having replaced his dark suit by jean trousers tucked in heavy boots, and a red flannel shirt over his starched white one—and, nodding gaily to Mainwaring, stepped from the lower end of the verandah. "The beggar actually looks pleased to go," said Mainwaring to himself in wonderment.

"Oh! Jim," said Mrs. Bradley, appearing at the door.

"Yes," said Bradley, faintly, from the bushes.

"Minty's ready. You might take her home."

"All right. I'll wait."

"I hope I haven't frightened Miss Sharpe away," said Mainwaring. "She isn't going, surely?"

"Only to get some better clothes, on account of company. I'm afraid you are giving her a good deal of trouble, Mr. Mainwaring," said Mrs. Bradley, laughing.

"She wished me to say good-bye to you for her, as she couldn't come on the verandah in her old shawl and sunbonnet," added Louise, who had joined them. "What do you really think of her, Mr. Mainwaring? I call her quite pretty, at times. Don't you?"

Mainwaring knew not what to say. He could not understand why they could have any special interest in the girl, or care to know what he, a perfect stranger, thought of her. He avoided a direct reply, however, by playfully wondering how Mrs. Bradley could subject her husband to Miss Minty's undivided fascinations.

"Oh, Jim always takes her home—if it's in the evening. He get's along with these people better than we do,"

returned Mrs. Bradley drily. "But," she added, with a return of her piquant Quaker-like coquettishness, "Jim says we are to devote ourselves to you to-night—in retaliation, I suppose. We are to amuse you, and not let you get excited; and you are to be sent to bed early."

It is to be feared that these latter wise precautions—invaluable for all defenceless and enfeebled humanity—were not carried out; and it was late when Mainwaring eventually retired, with brightened eyes and a somewhat accelerated pulse. For the ladies, who had quite regained that kindly equanimity which Minty had rudely interrupted, had also added a delicate and confidential sympathy in their relations with Mainwaring—as of people who had suffered in common—and he experienced these tender attentions at their hands which any two women are emboldened by each other's saving presence to show any single member of our sex. Indeed, he hardly knew if his satisfaction was the more complete when Mrs. Bradley, withdrawing for a few moments, left him alone on the verandah with Louise and the vast, omnipotent Night.

For awhile they sat silent, in the midst of the profound and measureless calm. Looking down upon the dim moonlit abyss at their feet, they themselves seemed a part of this night that arched above it; the half-risen moon appeared to linger long enough at their side to enwrap and suffuse them with its glory; a few bright stars quietly ringed themselves around them, and looked wonderingly into the level of their own shining eyes. For some vague yearning to humanity seemed to draw this dark and passionless void towards them. The vast protecting maternity of Nature leant hushed and breathless over this solitude. Warm currents of air rose occasionally from the valley, which one might have believed were sighs from its full and overflowing breast, or a grateful coolness swept their cheeks and air when the tranquil heights around them were moved to slowly respond. Odours from invisible bay and laurel

sometimes filled the air; the incense of some rare and remoter cultivated meadow beyond their ken, or the strong germinating breath of leagues of wild oats, that had yellowed the upland by day. In the silence and shadow, their voices took upon themselves, almost without their volition, a far-off confidential murmur, with intervals of meaning silence—rather as if their thoughts had spoken for themselves, and they had stopped wonderingly to listen. They talked at first vaguely to this discreet audience of space and darkness, and then, growing bolder, spoke to each other and of themselves. Invested by the infinite gravity of Nature, they had no fear of human ridicule to restrain their youthful conceit or the extravagance of their unimportant confessions. They talked of their tastes, of their habits, of their friends and acquaintances. They settled some points of doctrine, duty, and etiquette, with the sweet seriousness of youth and its all-powerful convictions. The listening vines would have recognised no flirtation or love-making in their animated but important confidences; yet when Mrs. Bradley reappeared to warn the invalid that it was time to seek his couch, they both coughed slightly in the nervous consciousness of some unaccustomed quality in their voices, and a sense of interruption far beyond their own or the innocent intruder's ken.

"Well?" said Mrs. Bradley, in the sitting-room, as Mainwaring's steps retreated down the passage to his room.

"Well," said Louise with a slight yawn, leaning her pretty shoulders languidly against the door-post, as she shaded her moonlight-accustomed eyes from the vulgar brilliancy of Mrs. Bradley's bedroom candle. "Well—oh, he talked a great deal about 'his people' as he called them, and I talked about us. He's very nice. You know, in some things he's really like a boy."

"He looks much better."

"Yes; but he is far from strong, yet."

Meantime, Mainwaring had no other confidant of his impressions than his own thoughts. Mingled with his exaltation, which was the more seductive that it had no well-defined foundation for existing, and implied no future responsibility, was a recurrence of his uneasiness at the impending visit of Richardson the next day. Strangely enough, it had increased under the stimulus of the evening. Just as he was really getting on with the family, he felt sure that this visitor would import some foreign element into their familiarity as Minty had done. It was very possible they would not like him; now he remembered there was really something ostentatiously British and insular about this Richardson—something they would likely resent. Why couldn't this fellow have come later—or even before? Before what? But here he fell asleep, and almost instantly slipped from this verandah in the Sierras, six thousand miles away, to an ancient terrace, overgrown with moss and tradition, that overlooked the sedate glory of an English park. Here he found himself, restricted painfully by his inconsistent night-clothes, endeavouring to impress his mother and sisters with the singular virtues and excellences of his American host and hostesses—virtues and excellences that he himself was beginning to feel conscious had become more or less apocryphal in that atmosphere. He heard his mother's voice saying severely, "When you learn, Francis, to respect the opinions and prejudices of your family enough to prevent your appearing before them in this uncivilised aboriginal costume, we will listen to what you have to say of the friends whose habits you seem to have adopted;" and he was frantically indignant that his efforts to convince them that his negligence was a personal oversight, and not a Californian custom, were utterly futile. But even then this vision was brushed away by the bewildering sweep of Louise's pretty skirt across the dreamy picture, and her delicate features and softly-fringed eyes remained the last to slip from his fading consciousness.

The moon rose higher and higher above the sleeping house and softly breathing canyon. There was nothing to mar the idyllic repose of the landscape; only the growing light of the last two hours had brought out in the far eastern horizon a dim white peak, that gleamed faintly among the stars, like a bridal couch spread between the hills ringed with fading nuptial torches. No one would have believed that behind that impenetrable shadow to the west, in the heart of the forest, the throbbing saw-mill of James Bradley was even at that moment eating its destructive way through the conserved growth of Nature and centuries, and that the refined proprietor of house and greenwood, with the glow of his furnace fires on his red shirt, and his alert, intelligent eyes, was the genie of that devastation, and the toiling leader of the shadowy toiling figures around him.

CHAPTER III.

Amid the beauty of the most uncultivated and untrodden wilderness there are certain localities where the meaner and more common processes of Nature take upon themselves a degrading likeness to the slovenly, wasteful, and improvident processes of man. The unrecorded landslip, disintegrating a whole hillside, will not only lay bare the delicate framework of strata and deposit to the vulgar eye, but hurl into the valley a debris so monstrous and unlovely as to shame even the hideous ruins left by dynamite, hydraulic, or pick and shovel; an overflown and forgotten woodland torrent will leave in some remote hollow a disturbed and ungraceful chaos of inextricable logs, branches, rock, and soil, that will rival the unsavoury details of some wrecked or abandoned settlement. Of lesser magnitude and importance, there are certain natural dust-heaps, sinks, and cesspools, where the elements have collected the cast-

off, broken, and frayed disjecta of wood and field—the sweepings of the sylvan household. It was remarkable that Nature, so kindly considerate of mere human ruins, made no attempt to cover up or disguise these monuments of her own mortality: no grass grew over the unsightly landslides, no moss or ivy clothed the stripped and bleached skeletons of overthrown branch and tree; the dead leaves and withered husks rotted in their open grave, uncrossed by vine or creeper. Even the animals, except the lower organisations, shunned those haunts of decay and ruin.

It was scarcely a hundred yards from one of those dreary receptacles that Mr. Bradley had taken leave of Miss Minty Sharpe. The cabin occupied by her father, herself, and a younger brother, stood, in fact, on the very edge of the little hollow, which was partly filled with decayed wood, leaves, and displacements of the crumbling bank, with the coal dust and ashes which Mr. Sharpe had added from his forge, that stood a few paces distant at the corner of a cross-road. The occupants of the cabin had also contributed to the hollow the refuse of their household in broken boxes, earthenware, tin cans, and cast-off clothing; and it is not improbable that the site of the cabin was chosen with reference to this convenient disposal of useless and encumbering impedimenta. It was true that the locality offered little choice in the way of beauty. An outcrop of brown granite—a portent of higher altitudes—extended a quarter of a mile from the nearest fringe of dwarf laurel and "brush" in one direction; in the other an advanced file of Bradley's woods had suffered from some long-forgotten fire, and still raised its blackened masts and broken stumps over the scorched and arid soil, swept of older underbrush and verdure. On the other side of the road a dark ravine, tangled with briars and haunted at night by owls and wild cats, struggled wearily on, until blundering at last upon the edge of the Great Canyon, it slipped and lost itself for ever in a single furrow of those mighty

flanks. When Bradley had once asked Sharpe why he had not built his house in the ravine, the blacksmith had replied: "That until the Lord had appointed his time, he reckoned to keep his head above ground and the foundations thereof." Howbeit the ravine or the "run," as it was locally known, was Minty's only Saturday-afternoon resort for recreation or berries. "It was," she had explained, "pow'ful soothin', and solitary."

She entered the house—a rude, square building of unpainted boards—containing a sitting-room, a kitchen, and two bedrooms. A glance at these rooms, which were plainly furnished, and whose canvas-coloured walls were adorned with gorgeous agricultural implement circulars, patent medicine calendars, with poly-tinted chromos and cheaply illuminated scriptural texts, showed her that a certain neatness and order had been preserved during her absence; and, finding the house empty, she crossed the barren and blackened intervening space between the back door and her father's forge, and entered the open shed. The light was fading from the sky; but the glow of the forge lit up the dusty road before it, and accented the blackness of the rocky ledge beyond. A small curly-headed boy, bearing a singular likeness to a smudged and blackened crayon drawing of Minty, was mechanically blowing the bellows, and obviously intent upon something else; while her father—a powerfully-built man, with a quaintly dissatisfied expression of countenance—was with equal want of interest mechanically hammering at a horse-shoe. Without noticing Minty's advent, he lazily broke into a querulous drawling chaunt of some vague religious character:

> "O tur-ren, sinner; tur-ren.
> For the Lord bids you turn—ah!
> O tur-ren, sinner; tur-ren.
> Why will you die?"

The musical accent adapted itself to the monotonous fall of

the sledge-hammer; and at every repetition of the word "turn," he suited the action to the word by turning the horse-shoe with the iron in his left hand. A slight grunt at the end of every stroke, and the simultaneous repetition of "turn," seemed to offer him amusement and relief. Minty, without speaking, crossed the shop, and administered a sound box on her brother's ear. "Take that, and let me ketch you agen layin' low when my back's turned, to put on your store pants."

"The others had fetched away in the laig," said the boy, opposing a knee and elbow at acute angle to further attack.

"You jest get and change 'em," said Minty.

The sudden collapse of the bellows broke in upon the soothing refrain of Mr. Sharpe, and caused him to turn also.

"It's Minty," he said, replacing the horse-shoe on the coals, and setting his powerful arms and the sledge on the anvil with an exaggerated expression of weariness.

"Yes; it's me," said Minty, "and Creation knows it's time I *did* come, to keep that boy from ruinin' us with his airs and conceits."

"Did ye bring over any o' that fever mixter?"

"No. Bradley sez you're loading yerself up with so much o' that bitter bark—kuinine they call it over there—that you'll lift the ruff off your head next. He allows ye ain't got no ague; it's jest wind and dyspepsy. He sez yer's strong ez a hoss."

"Bradley," said Sharpe, laying aside his sledge with an aggrieved manner, which was, however, as complacent as his fatigue and discontent, "ez one of them nat'ral born finikin skunks ez I despise. I reckon he began to give p'ints to his parents when he was about knee-high to Richelieu there. He's on them confidential terms with hisself and the Almighty that he reckons he ken run a saw-mill and a man's insides at the same time with one hand tied behind him. And his finikin is up to his

conceit: he wanted to tell me that that yer handy brush dump outside our shanty was unhealthy. Give a man with frills like that his own way and he'd be a sprinkling odor Cologne and peppermint all over the country."

"He set your shoulder as well as any doctor," said Minty.

"That's bone-settin', and a nat'ral gift," returned Sharpe, as triumphantly as his habitual depression would admit; "it ain't conceit and finikin got out o' books! Well," he added, after a pause, "wot's happened?"

Minty's face slightly changed. "Nothin'; I kem back to get some things," she said shortly, moving away.

"And ye saw *him?*"

"Ye-e-s," drawled Minty carelessly, still retreating.

"Bixby was along here about noon. He says the stranger was suthin' high and mighty in his own country, and them 'Frisco millionaires are quite sweet on him. Where are ye goin'?"

"In the house."

"Well, look yer, Minty. Now that you're here, ye might get up a batch o' hot biscuit for supper. Dinner was that promiscous and experimental to-day, along o' Richelieu's nat'ral foolin', that I think I could git outside of a little suthin' now, if only to prop up a kind of innard sinkin' that takes me. Ye ken tell me the news at supper."

Later, however, when Mr. Sharpe had quitted his forge for the night, and, seated at his domestic board, was, with a dismal presentiment of future indigestion, voraciously absorbing his favourite meal of hot saleratus biscuits swimming in butter, he had apparently forgotten his curiosity concerning Mainwaring and settled himself to a complaining chronicle of the day's mishaps. "Nat'rally, havin' an extra lot o' work on hand and no time for foolin', what does that ornery Richelieu get up and do this mornin'? Ye know them ridiklus specimens that he's been chippin' outer that ledge that the yearth slipped from down the run, and

litterin' up the whole shanty with 'em. Well, darn my skin! if he didn't run a heap of 'em, mixed up with coal, unbeknownd to me, in the forge, to make what he called a 'fire essay' of 'em. Nat'rally I couldn't get a blessed iron hot, and didn't know what had gone of the fire, or the coal either, for two hours, till I stopped work and raked out the coal. That comes from his hangin' round that saw-mill in the woods, and listenin' to Bradley's high-falutin' talk about rocks and strata and sich."

"But Bradley don't go a cent on minin', Pop," said Minty. "He sez the woods is good enough for him; and there's millions to be made when the railroad comes along, and timber's wanted."

"But until then he's got to keep hisself, to pay wages, and keep the mill runnin'. Onless it's, ez Bixby says, that he hopes to get that Englishman to rope in some o' them 'Frisco friends of his to take a hand. Ye didn't have any o' that kind o' talk, did ye?"

"No; not *that* kind o' talk," said Minty.

"Not *that* kind o' talk!" repeated her father with aggrieved curiosity. "Wot kind, then?"

"Well," said Minty, lifting her black eyes to her father's; "I ain't no account, and you ain't no account either; you ain't got no college education, ain't got no friends in 'Frisco, and ain't got no high-toned style; I can't play the pianner, jabber French, nor get French dresses; we ain't got no fancy 'Shallet,' as they call it, with a first-class view of nothing; we've only a shanty on dry rock! But, afore *I'd* take advantage of a lazy, gawky boy—for it ain't anything else, though he's good meanin' enough—that happened to fall sick in *my* house, and coax and cosset him, and wrap him in white cotton, and mother him, and sister him, and Aunt Sukey him, and almost dry-nuss him gin'rally, jist to get him sweet on me and on mine, and take the inside track of others—*I'd* be an Injin! And if you'd allow it, Pop, you'd be wuss nor a nigger."

"Sho!" said her father, kindling with that intense gratification with which the male receives any intimation of alien feminine weakness. "It ain't that, Minty, I wanter know!"

"It's jist that, Pop; and I ez good ez let 'em know I seed it. I ain't a fool, if some folk do drop their eyes and pertend to wipe the laugh out of their noses with a handkerchief when I let out to speak. I mayn't be good enough kempany"——

"Look yer, Minty," interrupted the blacksmith sternly, half rising from his seat with every trace of his former weakness vanished from his hard-set face; "do you mean to say that they put on airs to ye—to *my* darter?"

"No," said Minty quickly; "the men didn't, and don't you, a man, mix yourself up with women's meannesses. I ken manage 'em, Pop, with one hand."

Mr. Sharpe looked at his daughter's flashing black eyes. Perhaps an uneasy recollection of the late Mrs. Sharpe's remarkable capacity in that respect checked his further rage.

"No. Wot I was sayin'," resumed Minty, "ez that I mayn't be thought by others good enough to keep kempany with baronetts ez is to be—though baronetts mightn't object—but I ain't mean enough to try to steal away some ole woman's darling boy in England, or snatch some likely young English girl's big brother outer the family without sayin' by your leave. How'd you like it if Richelieu was growed up, and went to sea—and it would be like his peartness—and he fell sick in some foreign land, and some princess or other skyugled *him* underhand away from us?"

Probably owing to the affair of the specimens, the elder Sharpe did not seem to regard the possible mesalliance of Richelieu with extraordinary disfavour. "That boy is conceited enough with hair ile and fine clothes for anything," he said plaintively. "But didn't that Louie Macy hev a feller already—that Captain Greyson? Wot's gone o' him?"

"That's it," said Minty; "he kin go out in the woods

and whistle now. But all the same, she could hitch him in again at any time if the other stranger kicked over the traces. That's the style over there at The Lookout. There ain't ez much heart in them two women put together ez would make a green gal flush up playin' forfeits. It's all in their breed, Pop. Love ain't going to spile their appetites and complexions, give 'em nose-bleed, nor put a drop o' water into their eyes in all their natural born days. That's wot makes me mad. Ef I thought that Loo cared a bit for that child I wouldn't mind; I'd just advise her to make him get up and get—pack his duds out o' camp, and go home and not come back until he had a written permit from his mother, or the other baronet in office."

"Looks sorter ef some one orter interfere," said the blacksmith reflectively. "'Tain't exakly a case for a vigilance committee, tho' it's agin public morals this sorter kidnappin' o' strangers. Looks ez if it might bring the county into discredit in England."

"Well, don't *you* go and interfere and havin' folks say ez my nose was put out o' jint over there," said Minty curtly. "There's another Englishman comin' up from 'Frisco to see him to-morrow. Ef he ain't scooped up by Jenny Bradley he'll guess there's a nigger in the fence somewhere. But there, Pop, let it drop. It's a bad aig, anyway," she concluded, rising from the table, and passing her hands down her frock and her shapely hips as if to wipe off further contamination of the subject. "Where's Richelieu agin?"

"Said he didn't want supper, and like ez not he's gone over to see that fammerly at the Summit. There's a little girl thar he's sparkin', about his own age."

"His own age!" said Minty indignantly. "Why, she's double that, if she's a day. Well—if he ain't the triflinest, conceitednest little limb that ever grew! I'd like to know where he got it from—it wasn't mar's style."

Mr. Sharpe smiled darkly. Richelieu's precocious gallantry evidently was not considered as gratuitous as his

experimental metallurgy. But as his eyes followed his daughter's wholesome, Phyllis-like figure, a new idea took possession of him; needless to say, however, it was in the line of another personal aggrievement, albeit it took the form of religious reflection.

"It's curous, Minty, wot's fore-ordained, and wot ain't. Now, yer's one of them high and mighty fellows, after the Lord, ez comes meanderin' around here, and drops off—ez fur ez I kin hear—in a kind o' faint at the first house he kems to, and is taken in and lodged and sumptuously fed; and nat'rally, they gets their reward for it. Now wot's to hev kept that young feller from coming *here* and droppin' down in my forge, or in this very room, and *you* a tendin' him, and jist layin' over them folks at The Lookout?"

"Wot's got hold o' ye, Pop! Don't I tell ye he had a letter to Jim Bradley?" said Minty quickly, with an angry flash of colour in her cheek.

"That ain't it," said Sharpe confidently; "it's cos he *walked*. Nat'rally you'd think he'd *ride*, being high and mighty, and that's where, ez the parson will tell ye, wot's merely fi-nite and human wisdom errs! Ef that feller had ridden he'd have had to come by this yer road, and by this yer forge, and stop a spell like any other. But it was fore-ordained that he should walk, jest cos it wasn't generally kalkilated and reckoned on. So *you* had no show."

For a moment Minty seemed struck with her father's original theory. But with a vigorous shake of her shoulders she threw it off. Her eyes darkened.

"I reckon you ain't thinking, Pop"—she began.

"I was only sayin' it was curous," he rejoined quietly. Nevertheless, after a pause, he rose, coughed, and going up to the young girl, as she leaned over the dresser, bent his powerful arm around her, and drawing her and the plate she was holding against his breast, laid his bearded cheek for an instant softly upon her rebellious head. "It's all right, Minty," he said; "ain't it, pet?" Minty's eyelids

closed gently under the familiar pressure. "Wot's that in your hair, Minty?" he said tactfully, breaking an embarrassing pause.

"Bar's grease, father," murmured Minty in a child's voice —the grown-up woman, under that magic touch, having lapsed again into her father's motherless charge of ten years before.

"It's pow'ful soothin', and pretty," said her father.

"I made it myself—do you want some?" asked Minty.

"Not now, girl!" For a moment they slightly rocked each other in that attitude—the man dexterously, the woman with infinite tenderness—and then they separated.

Late that night, after Richelieu had returned, and her father wrestled in his fitful sleep with the remorse of his guilty indulgence at supper, Minty remained alone in her room, hard at work, surrounded by the contents of one of her mother's trunks and the fragments of certain ripped-up and newly-turned dresses. For Minty had conceived the bold idea of altering one of her mother's gowns to the fashion of a certain fascinating frock worn by Louise Macy. It was late when her self-imposed task was completed. With a nervous trepidation that was novel to her, Minty began to disrobe herself preparatory to trying on her new creation. The light of a tallow candle and a large swinging lantern, borrowed from her father's forge, fell shyly on her milky neck and shoulders, and shone in her sparkling eyes, as she stood before her largest mirror—the long glazed door of a kitchen clock which she had placed upon her chest of drawers. Had poor Minty been content with the full, free, and goddess-like outlines that it reflected, she would have been spared her impending disappointment. For, alas! the dress of her model had been framed upon a symmetrically attenuated French corset, and the unfortunate Minty's fuller and ampler curves had under her simple country stays known no more restraining cincture than knew the Venus of Milo. The alteration was a hideous failure; it was

neither Minty's statuesque outline nor Louise Macy's graceful contour. Minty was no fool, and the revelation of this slow education of the figure and training of outline—whether fair or false in art—struck her quick intelligence with all its full and hopeless significance. A bitter light sprang to her eyes; she tore the wretched sham from her shoulders, and then wrapping a shawl around her, threw herself heavily and sullenly on the bed. But inaction was not a characteristic of Minty's emotion; she presently rose again, and, taking an old work-box from her trunk, began to rummage in its recesses. It was an old shell-encrusted affair, and the apparent receptacle of such cheap odds and ends of jewellery as she possessed: a hideous cameo ring, the property of the late Mrs. Sharpe, was missing. She again rapidly explored the contents of the box, and then an inspiration seized her, and she darted into her brother's bedroom.

That precocious and gallant Lovelace of ten, despite all sentiment, had basely succumbed to the gross materialism of youthful slumber. On a cot in the corner, half hidden under the wreck of his own careless and hurried disrobing, with one arm hanging out of the coverlid, Richelieu lay supremely unconscious. On the forefinger of his small but dirty hand the missing cameo was still glittering guiltily. With a swift movement of indignation Minty rushed with uplifted palm towards the tempting expanse of youthful cheek that lay invitingly exposed upon the pillow. Then she stopped suddenly.

She had seen him lying thus a hundred times before. On the pillow near him an undistinguishable mass of golden fur—the helpless bulk of a squirrel chained to the leg of his cot; at his feet a wall-eyed cat, who had followed his tyrannous caprices with the long-suffering devotion of her sex; on the shelf above him a loathsome collection of flies and tarantulas in dull green bottles; a slab of ginger-bread for light nocturnal refection, and her own pot of bear's

grease. Perhaps it was the piteous defencelessness of youthful sleep, perhaps it was some lingering memory of her father's caress; but as she gazed at him with troubled eyes, the juvenile reprobate slipped back into the baby-boy that she had carried in her own childish arms such a short time ago, when the maternal responsibility had descended with the dead mother's ill-fitting dresses upon her lank girlish figure and scant virgin breast—and her hand fell listlessly at her side.

The sleeper stirred slightly and awoke. At the same moment, by some mysterious sympathy, a pair of beady bright eyes appeared in the bulk of fur near his curls, the cat stretched herself, and even a vague agitation was heard in the bottles on the shelf. Richelieu's blinking eyes wandered from the candle to his sister, and then the guilty hand was suddenly withdrawn under the bedclothes.

"No matter, dear," said Minty; "it's mar's, and you kin wear it when you like, if you'll only ask for it."

Richelieu wondered if he was dreaming! This unexpected mildness—this inexplicable tremor in his sister's voice: it must be some occult influence of the night season on the sisterly mind, possibly akin to a fear of ghosts! He made a mental note of it in view of future favours, yet for the moment he felt embarrassedly gratified. "Ye ain't wantin' anything, Minty," he said affectionately; "a pail o' cold water from the far spring—no, nothin'?" He made an ostentatious movement as if to rise, yet sufficiently protracted to prevent any hasty acceptance of his prodigal offer.

"No, dear," she said, still gazing at him with an absorbed look in her dark eyes.

Richelieu felt a slight creepy sensation under that lovely far-off gaze. "Your eyes look awful big at night, Minty," he said. He would have added "and pretty," but she was his sister, and he had the lofty fraternal conviction

of his duty in repressing the inordinate vanity of the sex. "Ye're sure ye ain't wantin' nothin'?"

"Not now, dear." She paused a moment, and then said deliberately: "But you wouldn't mind turnin' out after sun-up and runnin' an errand for me over to The Lookout?"

Richelieu's eyes sparkled so suddenly that even in her absorption Minty noticed the change. "But ye're not goin' to tarry over there, ner gossip—you hear? Yer to take this yer message. Yer to say, 'that it will be on-possible for me to come back there, on account—on account of'"——

"Important business," suggested Richelieu; "that's the perlite style."

"Ef you like." She leaned over the bed and put her lips to his forehead, still damp with the dews of sleep, and then to his long-lashed lids. "Mind Nip!"—the squirrel—he practically suggested. For an instant their blonde curls mingled on the pillow. "Now go to sleep," she said curtly.

But Richelieu had taken her white neck in the short strangulatory hug of the small boy, and held her fast. "Ye'll let me put on my best pants?"

"Yes."

"And wear that ring?"

"Yes"—a little sadly.

"Then yer kin count me in, Minty; and see here"—his voice sank to a confidential whisper—"mebbee some day ye'll be beholden to *me* for a lot o' real jewellery."

She returned slowly to her room, and, opening the window, looked out upon the night. The same moon that had lent such supererogatory grace to the natural beauty of The Lookout, here seemed to have failed, as Minty had, in disguising the relentless limitations of Nature or the cruel bonds of custom. The black plain of granite, under its rays, appeared only to extend its poverty to some remoter barrier; the blackened stumps of the burnt forest

stood bleaker against the sky, like broken and twisted pillars of iron. The cavity of the broken ledge where Richelieu had prospected was a hideous chasm of bluish blackness, over which a purple vapour seemed to hover; the "brush dump" beside the house showed a cavern of writhing and distorted objects stiffened into dark rigidity. She had often looked upon the prospect: it had never seemed so hard and changeless; yet she accepted it, as she had accepted it before.

She turned away, undressed herself mechanically, and went to bed. She had an idea that she had been very foolish; that her escape from being still more foolish was something miraculous, and in some measure connected with Providence, her father, her little brother, and her dead mother, whose dress she had recklessly spoiled. But that she had even so slightly touched the bitterness and glory of renunciation—as written of heroines and fine ladies by novelists and poets—never entered the foolish head of Minty Sharpe, the blacksmith's daughter.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a little after daybreak next morning that Mainwaring awoke from the first unrefreshing night he had passed at The Lookout. He was so feverish and restless that he dressed himself at sunrise, and cautiously stepped out upon the still silent verandah. The chairs which he and Louise Macy had occupied were still, it seemed to him, conspicuously confidential with each other, and he separated them; but as he looked down into the Great Canyon at his feet he was conscious of some undefinable change in the prospect. A slight mist was rising from the valley, as if it were the last of last night's illusions; the first level sunbeams were obtrusively searching, and the keen morning

air had a dryly practical insistance which irritated him, until a light footstep on the further end of the verandah caused him to turn sharply.

It was the singular apparition of a small boy, bearing a surprising resemblance to Minty Sharpe, and dressed in a unique fashion. On a tumbled sea of blonde curls a "chip" sailor hat, with a broad red ribbon, rode jauntily. But here the nautical suggestion changed, as had the desire of becoming a pirate which induced it. A red shirt, with a white collar, and a yellow plaid ribbon tie, that also recalled Minty Sharpe, lightly turned the suggestion of his costume to mining. Short black velvet trousers, coming to his knee, and ostentatiously new short-legged boots, with visible straps like curling ears, completed the entirely original character of his lower limbs.

Mainwaring, always easily gentle and familiar with children and his inferiors, looked at him with an encouraging smile. Richelieu—for it was he—advanced gravely and held out his hand, with the cameo ring apparent. Mainwaring, with equal gravity, shook it warmly, and removed his hat. Richelieu, keenly observant, did the same.

"Is Jim Bradley out yet?" asked Richelieu carelessly.

"No; I think not. But I'm Frank Mainwaring. Will I do?"

Richelieu smiled. The dimples, the white teeth, the dark, laughing eyes, were surely Minty's?

"I'm Richelieu," he rejoined with equal candour.

"Richelieu?"

"Yes. That Frenchman—the Lord Cardinal—you know. Mar saw Forrest do him out in St. Louis."

"Do him?"

"Yes, in the theayter."

With a confused misconception of his meaning, Mainwaring tried to recall the historical dress of the great Cardinal and fit it to the masquerader—if such he were—before him. But Richelieu relieved him by adding—

"Richelieu Sharpe."

"Oh, that's your *name!*" said Mainwaring cheerfully. "Then you're Miss Minty's brother. I know her. How jolly lucky!"

They both shook hands again. Richelieu, eager to get rid of the burden of his sister's message, which he felt was in the way of free-and-easy intercourse with this charming stranger, looked uneasily towards the house.

"I say," said Mainwaring, "if you're in a hurry, you'd better go in there and knock. I hear some one stirring in the kitchen."

Richelieu nodded, but first went back to the steps of the verandah, picked up a small blue knotted handkerchief, apparently containing some heavy objects, and repassed Mainwaring.

"What! have you cut it, Richelieu, with your valuables? What have you got there?"

"Specimens," said Richelieu shortly, and vanished.

He returned presently. "Well, Cardinal, did you see anybody?" asked Mainwaring.

"Mrs. Bradley; but Jim's over to the mill. I'm goin' there."

"Did you see Miss Macy?" continued Mainwaring carelessly.

"Loo?"

"Loo!—well; yes."

"No. She's philanderin' with Captain Greyson."

"Philandering with Greyson?" echoed Mainwaring, in wonder.

"Yes; on horseback on the ridge."

"You mean she's riding out with Mr.—with Captain Greyson?"

"Yes; ridin' *and* philanderin'," persisted Richelieu.

"And what do you call philandering?"

"Well; I reckon you and she oughter know," returned Richelieu, with a precocious air.

"Certainly," said Mainwaring with a faint smile. Richelieu really was like Minty.

There was a long silence. This young Englishman was becoming exceedingly uninteresting. Richelieu felt that he was gaining neither profit nor amusement, and losing time. "I'm going," he said.

"Good morning," said Mainwaring, without looking up.

Richelieu picked up his specimens, thoroughly convinced of the stranger's glittering deceitfulness, and vanished.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Mrs. Bradley came from the house. She apologised, with a slightly distrait smile, for the tardiness of the household. "Mr. Bradley stayed at the mill all night, and will not be here until breakfast, when he brings your friend Mr. Richardson with him"—Mainwaring scarcely repressed a movement of impatience—"who arrives early. It's unfortunate that Miss Sharpe can't come to-day."

In his abstraction Mainwaring did not notice that Mrs. Bradley slightly accented Minty's formal appellation, and said carelessly—

"Oh, that's why her brother came over here so early!"

"Did *you* see him?" asked Mrs. Bradley, almost abruptly.

"Yes. He is an amusing little beggar; but I think he shares his sister's preference for Mr. Bradley. He deserted me here in the verandah for him at the mill."

"Louise will keep you company as soon as she has changed her dress," continued Mrs. Bradley. "She was out riding early this morning with a friend. She's very fond of early morning rides."

"*And* philandering," repeated Mainwaring to himself. It was quite natural for Miss Macy to ride out in the morning, after the fashion of the country, with an escort; but why had the cub insisted on the "philandering?" He had said, "*and* philandering," distinctly. It was a nasty thing for him to say. Any other fellow but he, Mainwaring, might misunderstand the whole thing. Perhaps he ought

to warn her—but no! he could not repeat the gossip of a child, and that child the brother of one of her inferiors. But was Minty an inferior? Did she and Minty talk together about this fellow Greyson? At all events, it would only revive the awkwardness of the preceding day, and he resolved to say nothing.

He was rewarded by a half-inquiring, half-confiding look in Louise's bright eyes, when she presently greeted him on the verandah. "She had quite forgotten," she said, "to tell him last night of her morning's engagement; indeed, she had half forgotten *it*. It used to be a favourite practice of hers, with Captain Greyson; but she had lately given it up. She believed she had not ridden since—since"——

"Since when?" asked Mainwaring.

"Well, since you were ill," she said frankly.

A quick pleasure shone in Mainwaring's cheek and eye; but Louise's pretty lips did not drop, nor her faint quiet bloom deepen. Breakfast was already waiting when Mr. Richardson arrived alone. He explained that Mr. Bradley had some important and unexpected business which had delayed him, but which, he added, "Mr. Bradley says may prove interesting enough to you to excuse his absence this morning." Mainwaring was not displeased that his critical and observant host was not present at their meeting. Louise Macy was, however, as demurely conscious of the different bearing of the two compatriots. Richardson's somewhat self-important patronage of the two ladies, and that Californian familiarity he had acquired, changed to a certain uneasy deference towards Mainwaring; while the younger Englishman's slightly stiff and deliberate cordiality was, nevertheless, mingled with a mysterious understanding that appeared innate and unconscious. Louise was quick to see that these two men, more widely divergent in quality than any two of her own countrymen, were yet more subtly connected by some unknown sympathy than the most equal of Americans. Minty's prophetic belief of the effect of the

two women upon Richardson was certainly true as regarded Mrs. Bradley. The banker—a large material nature—was quickly fascinated by the demure, puritanic graces of that lady, and was inclined to exhibit a somewhat broad and ostentatious gallantry that annoyed Mainwaring. When they were seated alone on the verandah, which the ladies had discreetly left to them, Richardson said—

"Odd I didn't hear of Bradley's wife before. She seems a spicy, pretty, comfortable creature. Regularly thrown away with him up here."

Mainwaring replied coldly that she was "an admirable helpmeet of a very admirable man," not, however, without an uneasy recollection of her previous confidences respecting her husband. "They have been most thoroughly good and kind to me; my own brother and sister could not have done more. And certainly not with better taste or delicacy," he added markedly.

"Certainly, certainly," said Richardson hurriedly. "I wrote to Lady Mainwaring that you were taken capital care of by some very honest people, and that"——

"Lady Mainwaring already knows what I think of them, and what she owes to their kindness," said Mainwaring drily.

"True, true," said Richardson apologetically. "Of course you must have seen a good deal of them. I only know Bradley in a business way. He's been trying to get the Bank to help him put up some new mills here; but we didn't see it. I dare say he is good company—rather amusing—eh?"

Mainwaring had the gift of his class of snubbing by the polite and forgiving oblivion of silence. Richardson shifted uneasily in his chair, but continued with assumed carelessness.

"No; I only knew of this cousin, Miss Macy. I heard of her when she was visiting some friends in Menlo Park last year. Rather an attractive girl. They say Colonel

Johnson, of Sacramento, took quite a fancy to her—it would have been a good match, I dare say, for he is very rich; but the thing fell through in some way. Then they say *she* wanted to marry that Spaniard, young Pico, of the Amador Ranche; but his family wouldn't hear of it. Somehow she's deuced unlucky. I suppose she'll make a mess of it with that Captain Greyson she was out riding with this morning."

"Didn't the Bank think Bradley's mills a good investment?" asked Mainwaring quietly, when Richardson paused.

"Not with him in it; he is not a business man, you know."

"I thought he was. He seems to me an energetic man, who knows his work, and is not afraid to look after it himself."

"That's just it. He has got absurd ideas of co-operating with his workmen, you know, and doing everything slowly, and on a limited scale. The only thing to be done is to buy up all the land on this ridge, run off the settlers, freeze out all the other mills, and put it into a big San Francisco company on shares. That's the only way we would look at it."

"But you don't consider the investment bad, even from *his* point of view?"

"Perhaps not."

"And you only decline it because it isn't big enough for the Bank?"

"Exactly."

"Richardson," said Mainwaring, slowly rising, putting his hands in his trouser pockets and suddenly looking down upon the banker from the easy level of habitual superiority, "I wish you'd attend to this thing for me. I desire to make some return to Mr. Bradley for his kindness. I wish to give him what help he wants—in his own way—you understand. I wish it, and I believe my father wishes it too. If you'd like him to write to you to that effect"——

"By no means; it's not at all necessary," said Richardson, dropping with equal suddenness into his old-world obsequiousness. "I shall certainly do as you wish. It is not a bad investment, Mr. Mainwaring, and, as you suggest, a very proper return for their kindness. And, being here, it will come quite naturally for me to take up the affair again."

"And—I say, Richardson."

"Yes, sir?"

"As these ladies are rather short-handed in their domestic service, you know, perhaps you'd better *not* stay to luncheon or dinner, but go on to the Summit House—it's only a mile or two further—and come back here this evening. I shan't want you until then."

"Certainly!" stammered Richardson. "I'll just take leave of the ladies!"

"It's not at all necessary," said Mainwaring quietly; "you would only disturb them in their household duties. I'll tell them what I've done with you if they ask. You'll find your stick and hat in the passage, and you can leave the verandah by these steps. By the way, you had better manage at the Summit to get some one to bring my traps from here to be forwarded to Sacramento to-morrow. I'll want a conveyance, or a horse of some kind, myself, for I've given up walking for a while; but we can settle about that to-night. Come early. Good morning!"

He accompanied his thoroughly subjugated countryman —who, however, far from attempting to reassert himself, actually seemed easier and more cheerful in his submission— to the end of the verandah, and watched him depart. As he turned back he saw the pretty figure of Louise Macy leaning against the doorway. How graceful and refined she looked in that simple morning dress! What wonder that she was admired by Greyson, by Johnson, and by that Spaniard!— no, by Jove, it was *she* that wanted to marry him!

"What have you sent away Mr. Richardson for?" asked

the young girl, with a half-reproachful, half-mischievous look in her bright eyes.

"I packed him off because I thought it was a little too hard on you and Mrs. Bradley to entertain him without help."

"But as he was *our* guest, you might have left that to us," said Miss Macy.

"By Jove! I never thought of that," said Mainwaring, colouring in consternation. "Pray forgive me, Miss Macy —but, you see, I knew the man, and could say it, and you couldn't."

"Well, I forgive you, for you look really so cut up," said Louise, laughing. "But I don't know what Jenny will say of your disposing of her conquest so summarily." She stopped and regarded him more attentively. "Has he brought you any bad news? if so, it's a pity you didn't send him away before. He's quite spoiling our cure."

Mainwaring thought bitterly that he had. "But it's a cure for all that, Miss Macy," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness; "and being a cure, you see, there's no longer an excuse for my staying here. I have been making arrangements for leaving here to-morrow."

"So soon?"

"Do you think it soon, Miss Macy?" asked Mainwaring, turning pale in spite of himself.

"I quite forgot—that you were here as an invalid only, and that we owe our pleasure to the accident of your pain."

She spoke a little artificially, he thought, yet her cheeks had not lost their pink bloom, nor her eyes their tranquillity. Had he heard Minty's criticism he might have believed that the organic omission noticed by her was a fact.

"And now that your good work as Sister of Charity is completed, you'll be able to enter the world of gaiety again with a clear conscience," said Mainwaring, with a smile that he inwardly felt was a miserable failure. "You'll be able

to resume your morning rides, you know, which the wretched invalid interrupted."

Louise raised her clear eyes to his, without reproach, indignation, or even wonder. He felt as if he had attempted an insult and failed.

"Does my cousin know you are going so soon?" she asked finally.

"No, I did not know myself until to-day. You see," he added hastily, while his honest blood blazoned the lie in his cheek, "I've heard of some miserable business affairs that will bring me back to England sooner than I expected."

"I think you should consider your health more important than any mere business," said Louise. "I don't mean that you should remain *here*," she added, with a hasty laugh, "but it would be a pity, now that you have reaped the benefit of rest and taking care of yourself, that you should not make it your only business to seek it elsewhere."

Mainwaring longed to say that within the last half-hour, living or dying had become of little moment to him; but he doubted the truth or efficacy of this time-worn heroic of passion. He felt, too, that anything he said was a mere subterfuge for the real reason of his sudden departure. And how was he to question her as to that reason? In escaping from these subterfuges, he was compelled to lie again. With an assumption of changing the subject, he said carelessly, "Richardson thought he had met you before—in Menlo Park, I think."

Amazed at the evident irrelevance of the remark, Louise said coldly that she did not remember having seen him before.

"I think it was at a Mr. Johnson's—or *with* a Mr. Johnson—or perhaps at one of those Spanish Ranches—I think he mentioned some name like Pico!"

Louise looked at him wonderingly for an instant and then gave way to a frank, irrepressible laugh, which lent

her delicate but rather set little face all the colour he had missed. Partially relieved by her unconcern, and yet mortified that he had only provoked her sense of the ludicrous, he tried to laugh also.

"Then, to be quite plain," said Louise, wiping her now humid eyes, "you want me to understand that you really didn't pay sufficient attention to hear correctly! Thank you; that's a pretty English compliment, I suppose."

"I dare say you wouldn't call it 'philandering?'"

"I certainly shouldn't, for I don't know what 'philandering' means."

Mainwaring could not reply with Richelieu, "You ought to know;" nor did he dare explain what he thought it meant, and how he knew it. Louise, however, innocently solved the difficulty.

"There's a country song I've heard Minty sing," she said. "It runs—

> 'Come, Philander, let us be a-marchin',
> Every one for his true love a-sarchin';
> Choose your true love now or never.' . . .

Have you been listening to her also?"

"No," said Mainwaring, with a sudden incomprehensible, but utterly irrepressible resolution; "but *I'm* 'a-marchin',' you know, and perhaps I must 'choose my true love now or never.' Will you help me, Miss Macy?"

He drew gently near her. He had become quite white, but also very manly, and it struck her, more deeeply, thoroughly, and conscientiously sincere than any man who had before addressed her. She moved slightly away, as if to rest herself by laying both hands upon the back of the chair.

"Where do you expect to begin your 'sarchin'?'" she said, leaning on the chair and tilting it before her; "or are you as vague as usual as to locality? Is it at some 'Mr. Johnson' or 'Mr. Pico,' or"——

"Here," he interrupted boldly.

"I really think you ought to first tell my cousin that you are going away to-morrow," she said, with a faint smile: "it's such short notice. She's just in there." She nodded her pretty head, without raising her eyes, towards the hall.

"But it may not be so soon," said Mainwaring.

"Oh, then the 'sarchin'' is not so important?" said Louise, raising her head, and looking towards the hall with some uneasy but indefinable feminine instinct.

She was right; the sitting-room door opened, and Mrs. Bradley made her smiling appearance.

"Mr. Mainwaring was just looking for you," said Louise, for the first time raising her eyes to him. "He's not only sent off Mr. Richardson, but he's going away himself to-morrow."

Mrs. Bradley looked from the one to the other in mute wonder. Mainwaring cast an imploring glance at Louise, which had the desired effect. Much more seriously, and in a quaint, business-like way, the young girl took it upon herself to explain to Mrs. Bradley that Richardson had brought the invalid some important news that would, unfortunately, not only shorten his stay in America, but even compel him to leave The Lookout sooner than he expected —perhaps to-morrow. Mainwaring thanked her with his eyes, and then turned to Mrs. Bradley.

"Whether I go to-morrow or next day," he said with simple and earnest directness, "I intend, you know, to see you soon again, either here or in my own home in England. I do not know," he added with marked gravity, "that I have succeeded in convincing you that I have made your family already well known to my people, and that"—he fixed his eyes with a meaning look on Louise —"no matter when, or in what way, you come to them, your place is made ready for you. You may not like them, you know: the governor is getting to be an old

man—perhaps too old for young Americans—but *they* will like *you*, and you must put up with that. My mother and sisters know Miss Macy as well as I do, and will make her one of the family."

The conscientious earnestness with which these apparent conventionalities were uttered, and some occult quality of quiet conviction in the young man's manner, brought a pleasant sparkle to the eyes of Mrs. Bradley and Louise.

"But," said Mrs. Bradley gaily, "our going to England is quite beyond our present wildest dreams; nothing but a windfall, an unexpected rise in timber, or even the tabooed hotel speculation, could make it possible."

"But *I* shall take the liberty of trying to present it to Mr. Bradley to-night in some practical way that may convince even his critical judgment," said Mainwaring, still seriously. "It will be," he added more lightly, "the famous testimonial of my cure which I promised you."

"And you will find Mr. Bradley so sceptical that you will be obliged to defer your going," said Mrs. Bradley triumphantly. "Come, Louise, we must not forget that we have still Mr. Mainwaring's present comfort to look after; that Minty has basely deserted us, and that we ourselves must see that the last days of our guest beneath our roof are not remembered for their privation."

She led Louise away with a half-mischievous suggestion of maternal propriety, and left Mainwaring once more alone on the verandah.

He had done it! Certainly she must have understood his meaning, and there was nothing left for him now but to acquaint Bradley with his intentions to-night, and press her for a final answer in the morning. There would be no indelicacy then in asking her for an interview more free from interruption than this public verandah. Without conceit he did not doubt what the answer would be. His indecision, his sudden resolution to leave her, had been all based upon the uncertainty of *his* own feelings, the propriety

of *his* declaration, the possibility of some previous experience of hers that might compromise *him.* Convinced by her unembarrassed manner of her innocence, or rather satisfied of her indifference to Richardson's gossip, he had been hurried by his feelings into an unexpected avowal. Brought up in the perfect security of his own social position and familiarly conscious—without vanity—of its importance and power in such a situation, he believed, without undervaluing Louise's charms or independence, that he had no one else than himself to consult. Even the slight uneasiness that still pursued him was more due to his habitual conscientiousness of his own intention than to any fear that she would not fully respond to it. Indeed, with his conservative ideas of proper feminine self-restraint, Louise's calm passivity and undemonstrative attitude were a proof of her superiority; had she blushed over-much, cried, or thrown herself into his arms, he would have doubted the wisdom of so easy a selection. It was true he had known her scarcely three weeks; if he chose to be content with that his own accessible record of three centuries should be sufficient for her, and condone any irregularity.

Nevertheless, as an hour slipped away and Louise did not make her appearance—either on the verandah or in the little sitting-room of the hall—Mainwaring became more uneasy as to the incompleteness of their interview. Perhaps a faint suspicion of the inadequacy of her response began to trouble him; but he still fatuously regarded it rather as owing to his own hurried and unfinished declaration. It was true that he hadn't said half what he intended to say; it was true that she might have misunderstood it as the conventional gallantry of the situation, as—terrible thought!—the light banter of the habitual love-making American, to which she had been accustomed; perhaps even now she relegated him to the level of Greyson, and this accounted for her singular impassiveness—an impassiveness that certainly was singular now he reflected upon

it—that might have been even contempt! The last thought pricked his deep conscientiousness; he walked hurriedly up and down the verandah, and then suddenly re-entering his room, took up a sheet of note-paper and began to write to her:—

"Can you grant me a few moments' interview alone? I cannot bear you should think that what I was trying to tell you when we were interrupted was prompted by anything but the deepest sincerity and conviction, or that I am willing it should be passed over lightly by you or be forgotten. Pray give me a chance of proving it by saying you will see me. F. M."

But how should he convey this to her? His delicacy revolted against handing it to her behind Mrs. Bradley's back, or the prestidigitation of slipping it into her lap or under her plate before them at luncheon; he thought for an instant of the Chinaman, but gentlemen—except in that "mirror of nature," the stage—usually hesitate to suborn other people's servants, or entrust a woman's secret to her inferiors. He remembered that Louise's room was at the further end of the house, and its low window gave upon the verandah, and was guarded at night by a film of white and blue curtains that were parted during the day to allow a triangular revelation of a pale blue and white draped interior. Mainwaring reflected that the low inside window-ledge was easily accessible from the verandah, would afford a capital lodgment for the note, and be quickly seen by the fair occupant of the room on entering. He sauntered slowly past the window; the room was empty, the moment propitious. A slight breeze was stirring the blue ribbons of the curtain; it would be necessary to secure the note with something; he returned along the verandah to the steps, where he had noticed a small irregular stone lying, which had evidently escaped from Richelieu's bag of trea-

sure specimens, and had been overlooked by that ingenuous child. It was of a pretty peacock-blue colour, and, besides securing a paper, would be sure to attract her attention. He placed his note on the inside ledge and the blue stone atop, and went away with a sense of relief.

Another half-hour passed without incident. He could hear the voices of the two women in the kitchen and dining-room. After a while they appeared to cease, and he heard the sound of an opening door. It then occurred to him that the verandah was still too exposed for a confidential interview, and he resolved to descend the steps, pass before the windows of the kitchen, where Louise might see him, and penetrate the shrubbery, where she might be induced to follow him. They would not be interrupted nor overheard there.

But he had barely left the verandah before the figure of Richelieu, who had been patiently waiting for Mainwaring's disappearance, emerged stealthily from the shrubbery. He had discovered his loss on handing his "fire assays" to the good-humoured Bradley for later examination, and he had retraced his way, step by step, looking everywhere for his missing stone with the unbounded hopefulness, lazy persistency, and lofty disregard for time and occupation known only to the genuine boy. He remembered to have placed his knotted bag upon the verandah, and, slipping off his stiff boots, slowly and softly slid along against the wall of the house, looking carefully on the floor, and yet preserving a studied negligence of demeanour, with one hand in his pocket and his small mouth contracted into a singularly soothing and almost voiceless whistle—Richelieu's own peculiar accomplishment. But no stone appeared. Like most of his genus he was superstitious, and repeated to himself the cabalistic formula: "Losin's seekin's, findin's keepin's"—presumed to be of great efficacy in such cases —with religious fervour. He had laboriously reached the end of the verandah when he noticed the open window of

Louise's room, and stopped as a perfunctory duty to look in. And then Richelieu Sharpe stood for an instant utterly confounded and aghast at this crowning proof of the absolute infamy and sickening enormity of Man.

There was *his* stone—*his*, *Richelieu's*, *own specimen*, carefully gathered by himself and none other—and now stolen, abstracted, "skyugled," "smouged," "hooked" by this "rotten, skunkified, long-legged, splay-footed, hoss-laughin', nigger-toothed, or'nary despot!" And, worse than all, actually made to do infamous duty as a love token!—a "candy-gift"!—a "philanderin' box"! to *his*, Richelieu's, girl—for Louise belonged to that innocent and vague outside seraglio of Richelieu's boyish dreams—and put atop of a letter to her! and Providence permitted such an outrage! "Wot was he, Richelieu, sent to school for, and organised wickedness in the shape of gorilla Injins like this allowed to ride high horses rampant over Californey!" He looked at the heavens in mute appeal. And then—Providence not immediately interfering—he thrust his own small arm into the window, regained his priceless treasure, and fled swiftly.

A fateful silence ensued. The wind slightly moved the curtain outward, as if in a playful attempt to follow him, and then subsided. A moment later, apparently reinforced by other winds, or sympathising with Richelieu, it lightly lifted the unlucky missive and cast it softly from the window. But here another wind, lying in wait, caught it cleverly, and tossed it, in a long curve, into the abyss. For an instant it seemed to float lazily, as on the mirrored surface of a lake, until, turning upon its side, it suddenly darted into utter oblivion.

When Mainwaring returned from the shrubbery, he went softly to the window. The disappearance of the letter and stone satisfied him of the success of his stratagem, and for the space of three hours relieved his anxiety. But at the end of that time, finding no response from Louise, his

former uneasiness returned. Was she offended, or—the first doubt of her acceptance of him crossed his mind! A sudden and inexplicable sense of shame came upon him. At the same moment, he heard his name called from the steps, turned—and beheld Minty.

Her dark eyes were shining with a pleasant light, and her lips parted on her white teeth with a frank, happy smile. She advanced and held out her hand. He took it with a mingling of disappointment and embarrassment.

"You're wondering why I kem on here, arter I sent word this morning that I kelkilated not to come. Well, 'twixt then and now suthin's happened. We've had fine doin's over at our house, you bet! Pop don't know which end he's standin' on; and I reckon that for about ten minutes I didn't know my own name. But ez soon ez I got fairly hold o' the hull thing, and had it put straight in my mind, I sez to myself, Minty Sharpe, sez I, the first thing for you to do now, is to put on yer bonnet and shawl, and trapse over to Jim Bradley's, and help them two womenfolks get dinner for themselves and that sick stranger. And," continued Minty, throwing herself into a chair and fanning her glowing face with her apron, "yer I am!"

"But you have not told me *what* has happened," said Mainwaring, with a constrained smile, and an uneasy glance towards the house.

"That's so," said Minty, with a brilliant laugh. "I clean forgot the hull gist of the thing. Well, we're rich folks now —over thar on Barren Ledge! That onery brother of mine, Richelieu, hez taken some of his specimens over to Jim Bradley to be tested. And Bradley, just to please that child, takes 'em; and not an hour ago Bradley comes running, likety switch, over to Pop to tell him to put up his notices, for the hull of that ledge where the forge stands is a mine o' silver and copper. Afore ye knew it, Lordy! half the folks outer the Summit and the mill was scattered down thar all over it. Richardson—that

stranger ez knows you—kem thar too with Jim, and he allows, ef Bradley's essay is right, it's worth more than a hundred thousand dollars ez it stands!"

"I suppose I must congratulate you, Miss Sharpe," said Mainwaring with an attempt at interest, but his attention still preoccupied with the open doorway.

"Oh, *they* know all about it!" said Minty, following the direction of his abstracted eyes with a slight darkening of her own, "I jest kem out o' the kitchen the other way, and Jim sent 'em a note; but I allowed I'd tell *you* myself. Specially ez you was going away to-morrow."

"Who said I was going away to-morrow?" asked Mainwaring uneasily.

"Loo Macy!"

"Ah—she did? But I may change my mind, you know!" he continued, with a faint smile.

Minty shook her curls decisively. "I reckon *she* knows," she said drily, "she's got law and gospel for wot she says. But yer she comes. Ask her! Look yer, Loo," she added, as the two women appeared at the doorway, with a certain exaggeration of congratulatory manner that struck Mainwaring as being as artificial and disturbed as his own; "didn't Sir Francis yer say he was going to-morrow?"

"That's what I understood!" returned Louise, with cold astonishment, letting her clear indifferent eyes fall upon Mainwaring. "I do not know that he has changed his mind."

"Unless, as Miss Sharpe is a great capitalist now, she is willing to use her powers of persuasion," added Mrs. Bradley, with a slight acidulous pointing of her usual prim playfulness.

"I reckon Minty Sharpe's the same ez she allus wos, unless more so," returned Minty, with an honest egotism that carried so much conviction to the hearer as to condone its vanity. "But I kem yer to do a day's work, gals, and I allow to pitch in and do it, and not sit yer swoppin'

compliments and keeping *him* from packin' his duds. Onless," she stopped, and looked around at the uneasy, unsympathetic circle with a faint tremulousness of lip that belied the brave black eyes above it, "onless I'm in yer way."

The two women sprang forward with a feminine bewildering excess of protestation; and Mainwaring, suddenly pierced through his outer selfish embarrassment to his more honest depths, stammered quickly—

"Look here, Miss Sharpe, if you think of running away again, after having come all the way here to make us share the knowledge of your good fortune and your better heart, by Jove! I'll go back with you."

But here the two women effusively hurried her away from the dangerous proximity of such sympathetic honesty, and a moment later Mainwaring heard her laughing voice, as of old, ringing in the kitchen. And then, as if unconsciously responding to the significant common-sense that lay in her last allusion to him, he went to his room and grimly began his packing.

He did not again see Louise alone. At their informal luncheon the conversation turned upon the more absorbing topic of the Sharpes' discovery, its extent, and its probable effect upon the fortunes of the locality. He noticed, abstractedly, that both Mrs. Bradley and her cousin showed a real or assumed scepticism of its value. This did not disturb him greatly, except for its intended check upon Minty's enthusiasm. He was more conscious, perhaps—with a faint touch of mortified vanity—that his own contemplated departure was of lesser importance than this local excitement. Yet, in his growing conviction that all was over—if, indeed, it had ever begun—between himself and Louise, he was grateful to this natural diversion of incident which spared them both an interval of embarrassing commonplaces. And, with the suspicion of some indefinable insincerity—either of his own or Louise's—haunting

him, Minty's frank heartiness and outspoken loyalty gave him a strange relief. It seemed to him as if the clear cool breath of the forest had entered with her homely garments, and the steadfast truths of Nature were incarnate in her shining eyes. How far this poetic fancy would have been consistent or even co-existent with any gleam of tenderness or self-forgetfulness in Louise's equally pretty orbs, I leave the satirical feminine reader to determine.

It was late when Bradley at last returned, bringing further and more complete corroboration of the truth of Sharpe's good fortune. Two experts had arrived, one from Pine Flat and another from the Summit, and upon this statement Richardson had offered to purchase an interest in the discovery that would at once enable the blacksmith to develop his mine. "I shouldn't wonder, Mainwaring," he added cheerfully, "if he'd put you into it, too, and make your eternal fortune."

"With larks falling from the skies all round you, it's a pity *you* couldn't get put into something," said Mrs. Bradley, straightening her pretty brows.

"I'm not a gold-miner, my dear," said Bradley pleasantly.

"Nor a gold-finder," returned his wife, with a cruel little depression of her pink nostrils; "but you can work all night in that stupid mill, and then," she added in a low voice, to escape Minty's attention, "spend the whole of the next day examining and following up a boy's discovery that his own relations had been too lazy and too ignorant to understand and profit by. I suppose that next you will be hunting up a site on the *other side* of the Canyon where somebody else can put up an hotel and ruin your own prospects."

A sensitive shadow of pain quickly dimmed Bradley's glance—not the first or last time, evidently, for it was gradually bringing out a background of sadness in his intelligent eyes. But the next moment he turned kindly to Mainwaring, and began to deplore the necessity of his

early departure, which Richardson had already made known to him with practical and satisfying reasons.

"I hope you won't forget, my dear fellow, that your most really urgent business is to look after your health; and if, hereafter, you'll only remember the old Lookout enough to impress that fact upon you, I shall feel that any poor service I have rendered you has been amply repaid."

Mainwaring, notwithstanding that he winced slightly at this fateful echo of Louise's advice, returned the grasp of his friend's hand with an honest pressure equal to his own. He longed now only for the coming of Richardson, to complete his scheme of grateful benefaction to his host.

The banker came, fortunately, as the conversation began to flag; and Mrs. Bradley's half-coquettish ill-humour of a pretty woman, and Louise's abstracted indifference, were becoming so noticeable as to even impress Minty into a thoughtful taciturnity. The graciousness of his reception by Mrs. Bradley somewhat restored his former ostentatious gallantry, and his self-satisfied, domineering manner had enough masculine power in it to favourably affect the three women, who, it must be confessed, were a little bored by the finer abstractions of Bradley and Mainwaring. After a few moments, Mainwaring rose, and, with a significant glance at Richardson to remind him of his proposed conference with Bradley, turned to leave the room. He was obliged to pass Louise, who was sitting by the table. His attention was suddenly arrested by something in her hand with which she was listlessly playing. It was the stone which he had put on his letter to her.

As he had not been present when Bradley arrived, he did not know that this fateful object had been brought home by his host, who, after receiving it from Richelieu, had put it in his pocket to illustrate his story of the discovery. On the contrary, it seemed that Louise's careless exposure of his foolish stratagem was gratuitously and

purposely cruel. Nevertheless, he stopped and looked at her.

"That's a queer stone you have there," he said, in a tone which she recognised as coldly and ostentatiously civil.

"Yes," she replied, without looking up; "it's the outcrop of that mine." She handed it to him as if to obviate any further remark. "I thought you had seen it before."

"The outcrop," he repeated drily. "That is—it—it—it is the indication or sign of something important that's below it—isn't it?"

Louise shrugged her shoulders sceptically. "It don't follow. It's just as likely to cover rubbish, after you've taken the trouble to look."

"Thanks," he said, with measured gentleness, and passed quietly out of the room.

The moon had already risen when Bradley, with his briar-wood pipe, preceded Richardson upon the verandah. The latter threw his large frame into Louise's rocking-chair near the edge of the abyss; Bradley, with his own chair tilted against the side of the house after the national fashion, waited for him to speak. The absence of Mainwaring and the stimulus of Mrs. Bradley's graciousness had given the banker a certain condescending familiarity, which Bradley received with amused and ironical tolerance that his twinkling eyes made partly visible in the darkness.

"One of the things I wanted to talk to you about, Bradley, was that old affair of the advance you asked for from the Bank. We did not quite see our way to it then, and, speaking as a business man, it isn't really a matter of business now; but it has lately been put to me in a light that would make the doing of it possible—you understand? The fact of the matter is this: Sir Robert Mainwaring, the father of the young fellow you've got in your house, is one of our directors and largest shareholders, and I can tell you—if you don't suspect it already—you've been lucky, Bradley—deucedly lucky—to have had him in your house, and to

have rendered him a service. He's the heir to one of the largest landed estates in his county, one of the oldest county families, and will step into the title some day. But, ahem!" he coughed patronisingly, "you knew all that! No? Well, that charming wife of yours, at least, does; for she's been talking about it. Gad, Bradley, it takes those women to find out anything of that kind, eh?"

The light in Bradley's eyes and his pipe went slowly out together.

"Then we'll say that affair of the advance is as good as settled. It's Sir Robert's wish, you understand—and this young fellow's wish—and if you'll come down to the Bank next week we'll arrange it for you; I think you'll admit they're doing the handsome thing to you and yours. And therefore," he lowered his voice confidentially, "you'll see, Bradley, that it will only be the honourable thing in you, you know, to look upon the affair as finished, and, in fact, to do all you can"—he drew his chair closer—"to—to—to drop this other foolishness."

"I don't think I quite understand you," said Bradley slowly.

"But your wife does, if you don't," returned Richardson bluntly; "I mean this foolish flirtation between Louise Macy and Mainwaring, which is utterly preposterous. Why, man, it can't possibly come to anything, and it couldn't be allowed for a moment. Look at his position and hers. I should think, as a practical man, it would strike you"——

"Only one thing strikes me, Richardson," interrupted Bradley in a singularly distinct whisper, rising, and moving nearer the speaker; "it is that you're sitting perilously near the edge of this verandah. For, by the living God, if you don't take yourself out of that chair and out of this house, I won't be answerable for the consequences!"

"Hold on there a minute, will you?" said Mainwaring's voice from the window.

Both men turned towards it. A long leg was protruding from Mainwaring's window; it was quickly followed by the other leg and body of the occupant, and the next moment Mainwaring came towards the two men, with his hands in his pockets.

"Not so loud," he said, looking towards the house.

"Let that man go," said Bradley, in a repressed voice. "You and I, Mainwaring, can speak together afterwards."

"That man must stay until he hears what I have got to say," said Mainwaring, stepping between them. He was very white and grave in the moonlight, but very quiet; and he did not take his hands from his pockets. "I've listened to what he said because he came here on *my* business, which was simply to offer to do you a service. That was all, Bradley, that *I* told him to do. This rot about what he expects of you in return is his own impertinence. If you'd punched his head when he began it, it would have been all right. But since he has begun it, before he goes I think he ought to hear me tell you that I have already *offered* myself to Miss Macy, and she has *refused* me! If she had given me the least encouragement, I should have told you before. Further, I want to say that, in spite of that man's insinuations, I firmly believe that no one is aware of the circumstance except Miss Macy and myself."

"I had no idea of intimating that anything had happened that was not highly honourable and creditable to you and the young lady," began Richardson hurriedly.

"I don't know that it was necessary for you to have any ideas on the subject at all," said Mainwaring sternly; "nor that, having been shown how you have insulted this gentleman and myself, you need trouble us an instant longer with your company. You need not come back. I will manage my other affairs myself."

"Very well, Mr. Mainwaring—but—you may be sure that I shall certainly take the first opportunity to explain

myself to Sir Robert," returned Richardson, as, with an attempt at dignity, he strode away.

There was an interval of silence.

"Don't be too hard upon a fellow, Bradley," said Mainwaring, as Bradley remained dark and motionless in the shadow. "It is a poor return I'm making you for your kindness, but I swear I never thought of anything like—like—this."

"Nor did I," said Bradley bitterly.

"I know it, and that's what makes it so infernally bad for me. Forgive me, won't you? Think of me, old fellow, as the wretchedest ass you ever met, but not such a cad as this would make me!" As Mainwaring stepped out from the moonlight towards him with extended hand, Bradley finally grasped it.

"Thanks—there—thanks, old fellow! And, Bradley—I say—don't say anything to your wife, for I don't think she knows it. And, Bradley—look here—I didn't like to be anything but plain before that fellow; but I don't mind telling *you*, now that it's all over, that I really think Louise—Miss Macy—didn't altogether understand me either."

With another shake of the hand they separated for the night. For a long time after Mainwaring had gone, Bradley remained gazing thoughtfully into the Great Canyon. He thought of the time when he had first come there, full of life and enthusiasm, making an ideal world of his pure and wholesome eyrie on the ledge. What else he thought will, probably, never be known until the misunderstanding of honourable and chivalrous men by a charming and illogical sex shall be analysed and explained by some more daring romancer.

When he returned to the house, he said kindly to his wife, "I have been thinking to-day about your hotel scheme, and I shall write to Sacramento to-night to accept that capitalist's offer."

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE sun was just rising. In two years of mutation and change it had seen the little cottage, clinging like a swallow's nest to the rocky eaves of a great Sierran canyon, give way to a straggling, many-galleried hotel; and a dozen blackened chimneys rise above the barren tableland where once had stood the lonely forge. To that conservative orb of light and heat there must have been a peculiar satisfaction in looking down a few hours earlier upon the battlements and gables of Oldenhurst, whose base was deeply embedded in the matured foundations and settled traditions of an English county. For the rising sun had for the last ten centuries found Oldenhurst in its place, from the heavy stone terrace that covered the dead-and-forgotten wall where a Roman sentinel had once paced, to the little grating in the cloistered quadrangle, where it had seen a Cistercian brother place the morning dole. It had daily welcomed the growth of this vast and picturesque excrescence of the times; it had smiled every morning upon this formidable yet quaint incrustation of power and custom, ignoring, as Oldenhurst itself had ignored, the generations who possessed it, the men who built it, the men who carried it with fire and sword, the men who had lied and cringed for it, the king who had given it to a favourite, the few brave hearts who had died for it in exile, and the one or two who had bought and paid for it. For Oldenhurst had absorbed all these and more until it had become a story of the past, incarnate in stone, greenwood, and flower; it had even drained the life-blood from adjacent hamlets, repaying them with tumuli growths like its own, in the shape of purposeless lodges, quaintly incompetent hospitals

and schools, and churches where the inestimable blessing and knowledge of *its* gospel were taught and fostered. Nor had it dealt more kindly with the gentry within its walls, sending some to the scaffold, pillorying others in infamous office, reducing a few to poverty, and halting its later guests with gout and paralysis. It had given them in exchange the dubious immortality of a portrait gallery, from which they stared with stony and equal resignation; it had preserved their useless armour and accoutrements; it had set up their marble effigies in churches or laid them in cross-legged attitudes to trip up the unwary, until in death, as in life, they got between the congregation and the truth that was taught there. It had allowed an Oldenhurst crusader, with a broken nose like a pugilist, on the strength of his having been twice to the Holy Land, to hide the beautifully-illuminated Word from the lowlier worshipper on the humbler benches; it had sent an iconoclastic bishop of the Reformation to a nearer minster to ostentatiously occupy the place of the consecrated image he had overthrown. Small wonder that crowding the Oldenhurst retainers gradually into smaller space, with occasional Sabbath glimpses of the living rulers of Oldenhurst already in railed-off exaltation, it had forced them to accept Oldenhurst as a synonym of eternity, and left the knowledge of a higher Power to what time they should be turned out to their longer sleep under the tender grass of the beautiful outer churchyard.

And even thus, while every stone of the pile of Oldenhurst and every tree in its leafy park might have been eloquent with the story of vanity, selfishness, and unequal justice, it had been left to the infinite mercy of Nature to seal their lips with a spell of beauty that left mankind equally dumb; earth, air, and moisture had entered into a gentle conspiracy to soften, mellow, and clothe its external blemishes of breach and accident, its irregular design, its additions, accretions, ruins, and lapses with a

harmonious charm of outline and colour; poets, romancers, and historians had equally conspired to illuminate the dark passages and uglier inconsistencies of its interior life with the glamour of their own fancy. The fragment of menacing keep, with its choked oubliettes, became a bower of tender ivy; the grim story of its crimes, properly edited by a contemporary bard of the family, passed into a charming ballad. Even the superstitious darkness of its religious house had escaped through fallen roof and shattered wall, leaving only the foliated and sun-pierced screen of front, with its rose-window and pinnacle of cross behind. Pilgrims from all lands had come to see it; fierce Republicans had crossed the seas to gaze at its mediæval outlines, and copy them in wood and stucco on their younger soil. Politicians had equally pointed to it as a convincing evidence of their own principles and in refutation of each other; and it had survived both. For it was this belief in its own perpetuity that was its strength and weakness. And that belief was never stronger than on this bright August morning, when it was on the verge of dissolution. A telegram brought to Sir Robert Mainwaring had even then as completely shattered and disintegrated Oldenhurst, in all it was and all it meant, as if the brown-paper envelope had been itself charged with the electric fluid.

Sir Robert Mainwaring, whose family had for three centuries possessed Oldenhurst, had received the news of his financial ruin; and the vast pile which had survived the repeated invasion of superstition, force, intrigue, and even progress, had succumbed to a foe its founders and proprietors had loftily ignored and left to Jews and traders. The acquisition of money, except by despoilment, gift, Royal favour, or inheritance, had been unknown at Oldenhurst. The present degenerate custodian of its fortunes, staggering under the weight of its sentimental mortmain already alluded to, had speculated in order to keep up its material strength, which was gradually shrinking through

impoverished land and the ruined trade it had despised. He had invested largely in California mines, and was the chief shareholder in a San Francisco Bank. But the mines had proved worthless, the Bank had that morning suspended payment, owing to the failure of a large land and timber company on the Sierras, which it had imprudently "carried." The spark which had demolished Oldenhurst had been fired from the new telegraph-station in the hotel above the great Sierran canyon.

There was a large house-party at Oldenhurst that morning. But it had been a part of the history of the Mainwarings to accept defeat gallantly and as became their blood. Sir Percival—the second gentleman on the left as you entered the library—unhorsed, dying on a distant moor, with a handful of followers, abandoned by a charming Prince and a miserable cause, was scarcely a greater hero than this ruined but undaunted gentleman of eighty, entering the breakfast-room a few hours later as jauntily as his gout would permit, and conscientiously dispensing the hospitalities of his crumbling house. When he had arranged a few pleasure parties for the day, and himself thoughtfully anticipated the different tastes of his guests, he turned to Lady Mainwaring.

"Don't forget that somebody ought to go to the station to meet the Bradleys. Frank writes from St. Moritz that they are due here to-day."

Lady Mainwaring glanced quickly at her husband, and said *sotto voce*, "Do you think they'll care to come *now*? They probably have heard all about it."

"Not how it affects me," returned Sir Robert, in the same tone; "and as they might think that because Frank was with them on that California mountain we would believe it had something to do with Richardson involving the Bank in that wretched company, we must really *insist* upon their coming."

"Bradley!" echoed the Hon. Captain FitzHarry, over-

hearing the name during a late forage on the sideboard. "Bradley!—there was an awfully pretty American at Biarritz, travelling with a cousin, I think—a Miss Mason or Macy. Those sort of people, you know, who have a companion as pretty as themselves: bring you down with the other barrel if one misses—eh? Very clever, both of them, and hardly any accent."

"Mr. Bradley was a very dear friend of Frank's, and most kind to him," said Lady Mainwaring gravely.

"Didn't know there *was* a Mr. Bradley, really. He didn't come to the fore then," said the unabashed Captain. "Deuced hard to follow up those American husbands!"

"And their wives wouldn't thank you, if you did," said Lady Griselda Armiger, with a sweet smile.

"If it is the Mrs. Bradley I mean," said Lady Canterbridge from the lower end of the table, looking up from her letter, "who looks a little like Mrs. Summertree, and has a pretty cousin with her who wears very good frocks, I'm afraid you won't be able to get her down here. She's booked with engagements for the next six weeks. She and her cousin made all the running at Grigsby Royal, and she has quite deposed that other American beauty in Northforeland's good graces. She regularly *affiché'd* him, and it is piteous to see him follow her about. No, my dear; I don't believe they'll come to any one of less rank than a marquis. If they did, I'm sure Canterbridge would have had them at Buckenthorpe already."

"I wonder if there was ever anything in Frank's admiration of this Miss Macy?" said Lady Mainwaring a few moments later, lingering beside her husband in his study.

"I really don't know," said Sir Robert abstractedly; "his letters were filled with her praises, and Richardson thought"——

"Pray don't mention that man's name again," said Lady Mainwaring, with the first indication of feeling she had shown. "I shouldn't trust him."

"But why do you ask?" returned her husband.

Lady Mainwaring was silent for a moment. "She is very rich, I believe," she said slowly. "At least, Frank writes that some neighbours of theirs whom he met in the Engadine told him they had sold the site of that absurd cottage where he was ill for some extravagant sum."

"My dear Geraldine," said the old man affectionately, taking his wife's hand in his own, that now for the first time trembled, "if you have any hope based upon what you are thinking of now, let it be the last and least. You forget that Paget told us that with the best care he could scarcely ensure Frank's return to perfect health. Even if God in His mercy spared him long enough to take my place, what girl would be willing to tie herself to a man doomed to sickness and poverty? Hardly the one you speak of, my dear."

Lady Canterbridge proved a true prophet. Mrs. Bradley and Miss Macy did not come, regretfully alleging a previous engagement made on the Continent with the Duke of Northforeland and the Marquis of Dungeness; but the unexpected and apocryphal husband *did* arrive. "I have not seen my family," he said, "since I returned from visiting your son in Switzerland. I am glad they were able to amuse themselves without waiting for me at a London hotel, though I should prefer to have found them here." Sir Robert and Lady Mainwaring were courteous but slightly embarrassed. Lady Canterbridge, who had come to the station in bored curiosity, raised her clear blue eyes to his. He did not look like a fool, a complaisant or fashionably cynical husband—this well-dressed, well-mannered, but quietly and sympathetically observant man. Did he really care for his selfish wife? was it perfect trust or some absurd Transatlantic custom? She did not understand him. It wearied her, and she turned her eyes indifferently away. Bradley, a little irritated, he knew not why, at the scrutiny of this

tall, handsome, gentlemanly-looking woman, who, however, in spite of her broad shoulders and narrow hips possessed a refined muliebrity superior to mere liberality of contour, turned slightly towards Sir Robert. "Lady Canterbridge, Frank's cousin," explained Sir Robert hesitatingly, as if conscious of some vague awkwardness. Bradley and Lady Canterbridge both bowed—possibly the latter's salutation was the most masculine—and Bradley, eventually forgetting her presence, plunged into an earnest, sympathetic, and intelligent account of the condition in which he had found the invalid at St. Moritz. The old man at first listened with an almost perfunctory courtesy and a hesitating reserve; but as Bradley was lapsing into equal reserve, and they drove up to the gates of the quadrangle, he unexpectedly warmed with a word or two of serious welcome. Looking up with a half-unconscious smile, Bradley met Lady Canterbridge's examining eyes.

The next morning, finding an opportunity to be alone with him, Bradley, with a tactful mingling of sympathy and directness, informed his host that he was cognisant of the disaster that had overtaken the Bank, and delicately begged him to accept of any service he could render him. "Pardon me," he said, "if I speak as plainly to you as I would to your son; my friendship for him justifies an equal frankness to any one he loves; but I should not intrude upon your confidence if I did not believe that my knowledge and assistance might be of benefit to you. Although *I* did not sell my lands to Richardson or approve of his methods," he continued, "I fear it was some suggestion of mine that eventually induced him to form the larger and more disastrous scheme that ruined the Bank. So you see," he added lightly, "I claim a right to offer you my services." Touched by Bradley's sincerity and discreet intelligence, Sir Robert was equally frank. During the recital of his Californian investments—a chronicle of almost fatuous speculation and imbecile enterprise—Bradley was

profoundly moved at the naïve ignorance of business and hopeless ingenuousness of this old habitué of a cynical world and an insincere society, to whom no financial scheme had been too wild for acceptance. As Bradley listened with a half-saddened smile to the grave visions of this aged enthusiast, he remembered the son's unsophisticated simplicity; what he had considered as the "boyishness" of immaturity was the taint of the utterly unpractical Mainwaring blood. It was upon this blood, and others like it, that Oldenhurst had for centuries waxed and fattened.

Bradley was true to his promise of assistance, and with the aid of two or three of his brother millionaires, whose knowledge of the resources of the locality was no less powerful and convincing than the security of their actual wealth, managed to stay the immediate action of the catastrophe until the affairs of the Sierran Land and Timber Company could be examined and some plan of reconstruction arranged. During this interval of five months, in which the credit of Sir Robert Mainwaring was preserved with the secret of his disaster, Bradley was a frequent and welcome visitor to Oldenhurst. Apart from his strange and chivalrous friendship for the Mainwarings—which was as incomprehensible to Sir Robert as Sir Robert's equally eccentric and Quixotic speculations had been to Bradley—he began to feel a singular and weird fascination for the place. A patient martyr in the vast London house he had taken for his wife and cousin's amusement, he loved to escape the loneliness of its autumn solitude or the occasional greater loneliness of his wife's social triumphs. The handsome, thoughtful man who sometimes appeared at the foot of his wife's table or melted away like a well-bred ghost in the hollow emptiness of her brilliant receptions, piqued the languid curiosity of a few. A distinguished personage, known for his tactful observance of *convenances* that others forgot, had made a point of challenging this gentlemanly apparition, and had followed it up with

courteous civilities, which led to exchange of much respect but no increase of acquaintance. He had even spent a week at Buckenthorpe, with Canterbridge in the coverts and Lady Canterbridge in the music-room and library. He had returned more thoughtful, and for some time after was more frequent in his appearances at home, and more earnest in his renewed efforts to induce his wife to return to America with him.

"You'll never be happy anywhere but in California, among those common people," she replied; "and while I was willing to share your poverty *there*," she added drily, "I prefer to share your wealth among civilised ladies and gentlemen. Besides," she continued, "we must consider Louise. She is as good as engaged to Lord Dunshunner, and I do not intend that you shall make a mess of her affairs here as you did in California."

It was the first time he had heard of Lord Dunshunner's proposals; it was the first allusion she had ever made to Louise and Mainwaring.

Meantime, the autumn leaves had fallen silently over the broad terraces of Oldenhurst, with little changes to the fortunes of the great house itself. The Christmas house-party included Lady Canterbridge, whose husband was still detained at Homburg in company with Dunshunner; and Bradley, whose wife and cousin lingered on the Continent. He was slightly embarrassed when Lady Canterbridge turned to him one afternoon as they were returning from the lake and congratulated him abruptly upon Louise's engagement.

"Perhaps you don't care to be congratulated," she said, as he did not immediately respond, "and you had as little to do with it as with that other? It is a woman's function."

"What other?" echoed Bradley.

Lady Canterbridge slightly turned her handsome head towards him as she walked unbendingly at his side. "Tell

me how you manage to keep your absolute simplicity so fresh. Do you suppose it wasn't known at Oldenhurst that Frank had quite compromised himself with Miss Macy over there?"

"It certainly was not known 'over there,'" said Bradley curtly.

"Don't be angry with me."

Such an appeal from the tall, indifferent woman at his side, so confidently superior to criticism, and uttered in a lower tone, made him smile, albeit uneasily.

"I only meant to congratulate you," she continued carelessly. "Dunshunner is not a bad sort of fellow, and will come into a good property some day. And then, society is so made up of caprice, just now, that it is well for your wife's cousin to make the most of her opportunities while they last. She is very popular now; but next season"—— Seeing that Bradley remained silent, she did not finish her sentence, but said with her usual abruptness, "Do you know a Miss Araminta Eulalie Sharpe?"

Bradley started. Could any one recognise honest Minty in the hopeless vulgarity which this fine lady had managed to carelessly import into her name? His eye kindled.

"She is an old friend of mine, Lady Canterbridge."

"How fortunate! Then I can please you by giving you good news of her. She is the coming sensation. They say she is very rich, but quite one of the people, you know; in fact, she makes no scruples of telling you her father was a blacksmith, I think, and takes the dear old man with her everywhere. FitzHarry raves about her, and says her *naïveté* is something too delicious. She is regularly in with some of the best people already. Lady Dungeness has taken her up, and Northforeland is only waiting for your cousin's engagement to be able to go over decently. Shall I ask her to Buckenthorpe?—come, now, as an apology for my rudeness to your cousin?" She was very womanly now in spite of her high collar, her straight back,

and her tightly-fitting jacket, as she stood there smiling. Suddenly her smile faded; she drew her breath in quickly.

She had caught a glimpse of his usually thoughtful face and eyes, now illuminated with some pleasant memory.

"Thank you," he said smilingly, yet with a certain hesitation, as he thought of The Lookout and Aramita Eulalie Sharpe, and tried to reconcile them with the lady before him. "I should like it very much."

"Then you have known Miss Sharpe a long time?" continued Lady Canterbridge as they walked on.

"While we were at The Lookout she was our nearest neighbour."

"And I suppose your wife will consider it quite proper for you to see her again at my house?" said Lady Canterbridge, with a return of conventional levity.

"Oh! quite," said Bradley.

They had reached the low Norman-arched side entrance to the quadrangle. As Bradley swung open the bolt-studded oaken door to let her pass, she said carelessly—

"Then you are not coming in now?"

"No; I shall walk a little longer."

"And I am quite forgiven?"

"I am thanking you very much," he said, smiling directly into her blue eyes. She lowered them, and vanished into the darkness of the passage.

The news of Minty's success was further corroborated by Sir Robert, who later that evening called Bradley into the study. "Frank has been writing from Nice that he has renewed his acquaintance with some old Californian friends of yours—a Mr. and Miss Sharpe. Lady Canterbridge says that they are well known in London to some of our friends, but I would like to ask you something about them. Lady Mainwaring was on the point of inviting them here when I received a letter from Mr. Sharpe asking for a *business* interview. Pray, who is this Sharpe?"

"You say he writes for a *business* interview?" asked Bradley.

"Yes."

Bradley hesitated for a moment and then said quietly, "Perhaps, then, I am justified in a breach of confidence to him, in order to answer your question. He is the man who has assumed all the liabilities of the Sierran Land and Timber Company to enable the Bank to resume payment. But he did it on the condition that you were never to know it. For the rest he was a blacksmith who made a fortune, as Lady Canterbridge will tell you."

"How very odd—how kind, I mean! I should like to have been civil to him on Frank's account alone."

"I should see him on business and be civil to him afterwards." Sir Robert received the American's levity with his usual seriousness.

"No, they must come here for Christmas. His daughter is"——

"Araminta Eulalie Sharpe," said Bradley, in defiant memory of Lady Canterbridge.

Sir Robert winced audibly. "I shall rely on you, my dear boy, to help me make it pleasant for them," he said.

Christmas came, but not Minty. It drew a large contingent from Oldenhurst to the quaint old church, who came to view the green-wreathed monuments, and walls spotted with crimson berries, as if with the blood of former Oldenhurst warriors, and to impress the wondering villagers with the ineffable goodness and bounty of the Creator towards the Lords of Oldenhurst and their friends. Sir Robert, a little gouty, kept the house, and Bradley, somewhat uneasy at the Sharpes' absence, but more distrait with other thoughts, wandered listlessly in the long library. At the lower angle it was embayed into the octagon space of a former tower, which was furnished as a quaint recess for writing or study, pierced through its enormous walls with a lance-shaped window, hidden by heavy curtains. He

was gazing abstractedly at the melancholy eyes of Sir Percival, looking down from the dark panel opposite, when he heard the crisp rustle of a skirt. Lady Canterbridge, tightly and stiffly buttoned in black from her long narrow boots to her slim white-collared neck, stood beside him with a prayer-book in her ungloved hand. Bradley coloured quickly; the penetrating incense of the Christmas boughs and branches that decked the walls and ceilings, mingling with some indefinable intoxicating aura from the woman at his side, confused his senses. He seemed to be losing himself in some forgotten past coeval with the long, quaintly lighted room, the rich hangings, and the painted ancestor of this handsome woman. He recovered himself with an effort, and said, "You are going to church?"

"I may meet them coming home; it's all the same. You like *him?*" she said abruptly, pointing to the portrait. "I thought you did not care for that sort of man over there."

"A man like that must have felt the impotence of his sacrifice before he died, and that condoned everything," said Bradley thoughtfully.

"Then you don't think him a fool? Bob says it was a fair bargain for a title and an office, and that by dying he escaped trial and the confiscation of what he had."

Bradley did not reply.

"I am disturbing your illusions again. Yet I rather like them. I think you are quite capable of a sacrifice—perhaps you know what it is already."

He felt that she was looking at him; he felt equally that he could not respond with a commonplace. He was silent.

"I have offended you again, Mr. Bradley," she said. "Please be Christian, and pardon me. You know this is a season of peace and goodwill." She raised her blue eyes at the same moment to the Christmas decorations on the ceiling. They were standing before the parted drapery of

FEESE LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY

the lance window. Midway between the arched curtains hung a spray of mistletoe—the conceit of a mischievous housemaid. Their eyes met it simultaneously.

Bradley had Lady Canterbridge's slim, white hand in his own. The next moment voices were heard in the passage, and the door nearly opposite to them opened deliberately. The idea of their apparent seclusion and half compromising attitude flashed through the minds of both at the same time. Lady Canterbridge stepped quickly backward, drawing Bradley with her, into the embrasure of the window; the folds of the curtain swung together and concealed them from view.

The door had been opened by the footman, ushering in a broad-shouldered man, who was carrying a travelling-bag and an umbrella in his hand. Dropping into an arm-chair before the curtain, he waved away the footman, who, even now, mechanically repeated a previously vain attempt to relieve the stranger of his luggage.

"You leave that 'ere grip sack where it is, young man, and tell Sir Robert Mainwaring that Mr. Demander Sharpe, of Californy, wishes to see him—on business—on *business*, do ye hear? You hang onter that sentence—*on business!* it's about ez much ez you kin carry, I reckon, and leave that grip sack alone."

From behind the curtain Bradley made a sudden movement to go forward; but Lady Canterbridge—now quite pale but collected—restrained him with a warning movement of her hand. Sir Robert's stick and halting step were next heard along the passage, and he entered the room. His simple and courteous greeting of the stranger was instantly followed by a renewed attack upon the "grip sack," and a renewed defence of it by the stranger.

"No, Sir Robert," said the voice argumentatively, "this yer's a *business* interview, and until it's over—if *you* please —we'll remain ez we air. I'm Demander Sharpe, of Californy, and I and my darter, Minty, oncet had the pleasure

of knowing your boy over thar, and of meeting him agin the other day at Nice."

"I think," said Sir Robert's voice gently, "that these are not the only claims you have upon me. I have only a day or two ago heard from Mr. Bradley that I owe to your generous hands and your disinterested liberality the saving of my California fortune."

There was the momentary sound of a pushed-back chair, a stamping of feet, and then Mr. Sharpe's voice rose high with the blacksmith's old querulous aggrieved utterance—

"So it's that finikin', conceited Bradley agin—that's giv' me away! Ef that man's all-fired belief in his being the Angel Gabriel and Dan'l Webster rolled inter one don't beat anythin'! I suppose that high-flyin' jay-bird kalkilated to put you and me and my gal and yer boy inter harness for his four-hoss chariot and he sittin' kam on the box drivin' us! Why don't he 'tend to his own business, and look arter his own concerns—instead o' leaving Jinny Bradley and Loo Macy dependent on Kings and Queens and titled folks gen'rally, and he, Jim Bradley, philanderin' with another man's wife—while that thar man is hard at work tryin' to make a honest livin' fer his wife, buckin' agin' faro an' the tiger gen'rally at Monaco! Eh? And that man a-intermeddlin' with me! Ef," continued the voice dropped to a tone of hopeless moral conviction, "Ef there's a man I mor'lly despise—it's that finikin' Jim Bradley."

"You quite misunderstand me, my dear sir," said Sir Robert's hurried voice; "he told me you had pledged him to secrecy, and he only revealed it to explain why you wished to see me."

There was a grunt of half-placated wrath from Sharpe, and then the voice resumed, but more deliberately, "Well, to come back to business: you've got a boy, Francis, and I've got a darter, Araminty. They've sorter taken a shine

to each other and they want to get married. Mind yer—wait a moment!—it wasn't allus so. No, sir; when my gal Araminty first seed your boy in Californy she was poor, and she didn't kalkilate to get into anybody's family unbeknownst or on sufferance. Then she got rich and you got poor; and then—hold on a minit!—she allows, does my girl, that there ain't any nearer chance o' their making a match than they were afore, for she isn't goin' to hev it said that she married your son fur the chance of some day becomin' Lady Mainwaring."

"One moment, Mr. Sharpe," said the voice of the Baronet gravely: "I am both flattered and pained by what I believe to be the kindly object of your visit. Indeed, I may say I have gathered a suspicion of what might be the sequel of this most unhappy acquaintance of my son and your daughter; but I cannot believe that he has kept you in ignorance of his unfortunate prospects and his still more unfortunate state of health."

"When I told ye to hold on a minit," continued the blacksmith's voice, with a touch of querulousness in its accent, "that was jist wot I was comin' to. I knowed part of it from my own pocket, she knowed the rest of it from his lips and the doctors she interviewed. And then she says to me—sez my girl Minty—'Pop,' she sez, 'he's got nothing to live for now but his title, and that he never may live to get, so that I think ye kin jist go, Pop, and fairly and squarely, as a honest man, ask his father to let me hev him.' Them's my darter's own words, Sir Robert; and when I tell yer that she's got a million o' dollars to back them, ye'll know she means business every time."

"Did Francis know that you were coming here?"

"Bless ye, no! He didn't know that she would have him. Ef it kem to that, he ain't even asked her! She wouldn't let him until she was sure of *you*."

"Then you mean to say there is no engagement?"

"In course not. I reckoned to do the square thing first with ye."

The halting step of the Baronet crossing the room was heard distinctly. He had stopped beside Sharpe. "My dear Mr. Sharpe," he said, in a troubled voice, "I cannot permit this sacrifice. It is too—too great!"

"Then," said Sharpe's voice querulously, "I'm afraid we must do without your permission. I didn't reckon to find a sort o' British Jim Bradley in you. If *you* can't permit my darter to sacrifice herself by marryin' your son, I can't permit her to sacrifice her love and him by *not* marryin' him. So I reckon this yer interview is over."

"I am afraid we are both old fools, Mr. Sharpe; but—we will talk this over with Lady Mainwaring. Come." There was evidently a slight struggle near the chair over some inanimate object. But the next moment the Baronet's voice rose, persuasively, "Really, I must insist upon relieving you of your bag and umbrella."

"Well, if you'll let me telegraph 'yes' to Minty, I don't care if yer do."

When the room was quiet again, Lady Canterbridge and James Bradley silently slipped from the curtain, and, without a word, separated at the door.

There was a merry Christmas at Oldenhurst and at Nice. But whether Minty's loving sacrifice was accepted or not, or whether she ever reigned as Lady Mainwaring, or lived an untitled widow, I cannot say. But as Oldenhurst still exists in all its pride and power, it is presumed that the peril that threatened its fortunes was averted, and that if another heroine was not found worthy of a frame in its picture-gallery, at least it had been sustained as of old by devotion and renunciation.

Found at Blazing Star.

CHAPTER I.

THE rain had only ceased with the grey streaks of morning at Blazing Star, and the settlement awoke to a moral sense of cleanliness, and the finding of forgotten knives, tin cups, and smaller camp utensils, where the heavy showers had washed away the débris and dust heaps before the cabin doors. Indeed, it was recorded in Blazing Star that a fortunate early riser had once picked up on the highway a solid chunk of gold quartz, which the rain had freed from its encumbering soil and washed into immediate and glittering popularity. Possibly this may have been the reason why early risers in that locality during the rainy season adopted a thoughtful habit of body, and seldom lifted their eyes to the rifted or india-ink-washed skies above them.

"Cass" Beard had risen early that morning, but not with a view to discovery. A leak in his cabin roof—quite consistent with his careless, improvident habits—had roused him at 4 A.M. with a flooded "bunk" and wet blankets. The chips from his wood pile refused to kindle a fire to dry his bedclothes, and he had recourse to a more provident neighbour's to supply the deficiency. This was nearly opposite. Mr. Cassius crossed the highway, and stopped suddenly. Something glittered in the nearest red pool before him. Gold, surely! But, wonderful to relate, not an irregular, shapeless fragment of crude ore, fresh from Nature's crucible, but a bit of jeweller's handicraft, in the

form of a plain gold ring. Looking at it more attentively, he saw that it bore the inscription, "May to Cass."

Like most of his fellow gold-seekers, Cass was superstitious. "Cass!" His own name! He tried the ring; it fitted his little finger closely. It was evidently a woman's ring. He looked up and down the highway. No one was yet stirring. Little pools of water in the red road were beginning to glitter and grow rosy from the far-flushing East, but there was no trace of the owner of the shining waif. He knew that there was no woman in camp, and among his few comrades in the settlement he remembered to have seen none wearing an ornament like that. Again, the coincidence of the inscription to his rather peculiar nickname would have been a perennial source of playful comment in a camp that made no allowance for sentimental memories. He slipped the glittering little hoop into his pocket, and thoughtfully returned to his cabin.

Two hours later, when the long, straggling procession, which every morning wended its way to Blazing Star Gulch —the seat of mining operation in the settlement—began to move, Cass saw fit to interrogate his fellows. "Ye didn't, none on ye, happen to drop anything round yer last night?" he asked cautiously.

"I dropped a pocket-book containing Government bonds and some other securities, with between fifty and sixty thousand dollars," responded Peter Drummond carelessly; "but no matter: if any man will return a few autograph letters from foreign potentates that happened to be in it —of no value to anybody but the owner—he can keep the money. Thar's nothin' mean about me," he concluded languidly.

This statement, bearing every evidence of the grossest mendacity, was lightly passed over, and the men walked on with the deepest gravity.

"But hev you?" Cass presently asked of another.

"I lost my pile to Jack Hamlin at draw-poker, over

at Wingdam last night," returned the other pensively, "but I don't calkilate to find it lying round loose."

Forced at last by this kind of irony into more detailed explanation, Cass confided to them his discovery, and produced his treasure. The result was a dozen vague surmises—only one of which seemed to be popular and to suit the dyspeptic despondency of the party—a despondency born of hastily-masticated fried pork and flap-jacks. The ring was believed to have been dropped by some passing "road agent" laden with guilty spoil.

"Ef I was you," said Drummond, gloomily, "I wouldn't flourish that yer ring around much afore folks. I've seen better men nor you strung up a tree by *Vigilantês* for having even less than that in their possession."

"And I wouldn't say much about bein' up so d——d early this morning," added an even more pessimistic comrade; "it might look bad before a jury."

With this the men sadly dispersed, leaving the innocent Cass with the ring in his hand, and a general impression on his mind that he was already an object of suspicion to his comrades: an impression, it is hardly necessary to say, they fully intended should be left to rankle in his guileless bosom.

Notwithstanding Cass's first hopeful superstition, the ring did not seem to bring him nor the camp any luck. Daily the "clean up" brought the same scant rewards to their labours, and deepened the sardonic gravity of Blazing Star. But, if Cass found no material result from his treasure, it stimulated his lazy imagination, and, albeit a dangerous and seductive stimulant, at least lifted him out of the monotonous grooves of his half-careless, half-slovenly, but always self-contented camp life. Heeding the wise caution of his comrades, he took the habit of wearing the ring only at night. Wrapped in his blanket, he stealthily slipped the golden circlet over his little finger, and, as he averred, "slept all the better for it." Whether

it ever evoked any warmer dream or vision during those calm, cold, virgin-like spring nights, when even the moon and the greater planets retreated into the icy-blue, steel-like firmament, I cannot say. Enough, that his superstition began to be coloured a little by fancy, and his fatalism somewhat mitigated by hope. Dreams of this kind did not tend to promote his efficiency in the communistic labours of the camp, and brought him a self-isolation that, however gratifying at first, soon debarred him the benefits of that hard practical wisdom which underlaid the grumbling of his fellow-workers.

"I'm dog-goned," said one commentator, "ef I don't believe that Cass is looney over that yer ring he found. Wears it on a string under his shirt."

Meantime, the seasons did not wait the discovery of the secret. The red pools in Blazing Star highway were soon dried up in the fervent June sun and riotous night winds of those altitudes. The ephemeral grasses that had quickly supplanted these pools and the chocolate-coloured mud, were quickly parched and withered. The footprints of spring became vague and indefinite, and were finally lost in the impalpable dust of the summer highway.

In one of his long, aimless excursions, Cass had penetrated a thick undergrowth of buckeye and hazel, and found himself quite unexpectedly upon the high-road to Red Chief's Crossing. Cass knew by the lurid cloud of dust that hid the distance that the up-coach had passed. He had already reached that stage of superstition when the most trivial occurrence seemed to point in some way to an elucidation of the mystery of his treasure. His eyes had mechanically fallen to the ground again, as if he half expected to find in some other waif a hint or corroboration of his imaginings. Thus abstracted, the figure of a young girl on horseback, in the road directly before the bushes he emerged from, appeared to have sprung directly from the ground.

"Oh, come here, please do; quick!"

Cass stared, and then moved hesitatingly towards her.

"I heard some one coming through the bushes and I waited," she went on. "Come quick. It's something too awful for anything."

In spite of this appalling introduction, Cass could not but notice that the voice, although hurried and excited, was by no means agitated or frightened, that the eyes which looked into his sparkled with a certain kind of pleased curiosity.

"It was just here," she went on vivaciously, "just here that I went into the bush to cut a switch for my horse—' and "—leading him along at a brisk trot by her side—"just here, look, see! this is what I found."

It was scarcely thirty feet from the road. The only object that met Cass's eye was a man's stiff, tall hat lying emptily and vacantly in the grass. It was new, shiny, and of modish shape. But it was so incongruous, so perkily smart, and yet so feeble and helpless, lying there; so ghastly ludicrous in its very inappropriateness and incapacity to adjust itself to the surrounding landscape, that it affected him with something more than a sense of its grotesqueness, and he could only stare at it blankly.

"But you're not looking the right way," the girl went on sharply; "look there!"

Cass followed the direction of her whip. At last, what might have seemed a coat thrown carelessly on the ground met his eye, but presently he became aware of a white, rigid, aimlessly clenched hand protruding from the flaccid sleeve; mingled with it in some absurd way, and half hidden by the grass, lay what might have been a pair of cast-off trousers but for two rigid boots that pointed in opposite angles to the sky. It was a dead man. So palpably dead that life seemed to have taken flight from his very clothes. So impotent, feeble, and degraded by them that the naked subject of a dissecting-table would

have been less insulting to humanity. The head had fallen back and was partly hidden in a gopher burrow, but the white, upturned face and closed eyes had less of helpless death in them than those wretched enwrappings. Indeed, one limp hand that lay across the swollen abdomen lent itself to the grotesquely hideous suggestion of a gentleman sleeping off the excesses of a hearty dinner.

"Ain't he horrid?" continued the girl; "but what killed him?"

Struggling between a certain fascination at the girl's cold-blooded curiosity, and horror of the murdered man, Cass hesitatingly lifted the helpless head. A bluish hole above the right temple and a few brown paint-like spots on the forehead, shirt collar, and matted hair proved the only record.

"Turn him over again," said the girl impatiently, as Cass was about to relinquish his burden. "Maybe you'll find another wound."

But Cass was dimly remembering certain formalities that in older civilisations attend the discovery of dead bodies, and postponed a present inquest.

"Perhaps you'd better ride on, Miss, afore you get summoned as a witness. I'll give warning at Red Chief's Crossing, and send the coroner down here."

"Let me go with you," she said earnestly; "it would be such fun. I don't mind being a witness. Or," she added, without heeding Cass's look of astonishment, "I'll wait here till you come back."

"But you see, Miss, it wouldn't seem right"—— began Cass.

"But I found him first," interrupted the girl, with a pout.

Staggered by this pre-emptive right, sacred to all miners, Cass stopped.

"Who is the coroner?" she asked.

"Joe Hornsby."

"The tall, lame man, who was half-eaten by a grizzly?"

"Yes."

"Well, look now! I'll ride on and bring him back in half-an-hour! There!"

"But, Miss!"——

"Oh, don't mind *me.* I never saw anything of this kind before, and I want to see it *all.*"

"Do you know Hornsby?" asked Cass, unconsciously a trifle irritated.

"No, but I'll bring him." She wheeled her horse into the road.

In the presence of this living energy Cass quite forgot the helpless dead. "Have you been long in these parts, Miss?" he asked.

"About two weeks," she answered shortly. "Good-bye, just now. Look around for the pistol or anything else you can find, although *I* have been over the whole ground twice already."

A little puff of dust as the horse sprang into the road, a muffled shuffle, struggle, then the regular beat of hoofs, and—she was gone.

After five minutes had passed, Cass regretted that he had not accompanied her; waiting in such a spot was an irksome task. Not that there was anything in the scene itself to awaken gloomy imaginings; the bright truthful Californian sunshine scoffed at any illusion of creeping shadows or waving branches. Once in the rising wind, the empty hat rolled over—but only in a ludicrous, drunken way. A search for any further sign or token had proved futile, and Cass grew impatient. He began to hate himself for having stayed; he would have fled, but for shame. Nor was his good-humour restored when at the close of a weary half-hour two galloping figures emerged from the dusty horizon—Hornsby and the young girl.

His vague annoyance increased as he fancied that both seemed to ignore him, the coroner barely acknowledging

his presence with a nod. Assisted by the young girl, whose energy and enthusiasm evidently delighted him, Hornsby raised the body for a more careful examination. The dead man's pockets were carefully searched. A few coins, a silver pencil, knife, and tobacco-box were all they found. It gave no clue to his identity. Suddenly the young girl —who had, with unabashed curiosity, knelt beside the exploring official hands of Red Chief—uttered a cry of gratification.

"Here's something! It dropped from the bosom of his shirt on the ground. Look!"

She was holding in the air, between her thumb and forefinger, a folded bit of well-worn newspaper. Her eyes sparkled.

"Shall I open it?" she asked.

"Yes."

"It's a little ring," she said: "looks like an engagement ring. Something is written on it. Look! 'May to Cass.'"

Cass darted forward. "It's mine," he stammered, "mine! I dropped it. It's nothing—nothing," he went on after a pause, embarrassed and blushing as the girl and her companion both stared at him—"a mere trifle. I'll take it."

But the coroner opposed his outstretched hand. "Not much," he said significantly.

"But it's *mine!*" continued Cass, indignation taking the place of shame at his discovered secret. "I found it six months ago in the road. I—picked it up."

"With your name already written on it! How handy!" said the coroner grimly.

"It's an old story," said Cass, blushing again under the half-mischievous, half-searching eyes of the girl. "All Blazing Star knows I found it."

"Then ye'll have no difficulty in provin' it," said Hornsby coolly. "Just now, however, *we've* found it, and we propose to keep it for the inquest."

Cass shrugged his shoulders. Further altercation would have only heightened his ludicrous situation in the girl's eyes. He turned away, leaving his treasure in the coroner's hands.

The inquest, a day or two later, was prompt and final. No clue to the dead man's identity; no evidence sufficiently strong to prove murder or suicide; no trace of any kind, inculpating any party known or unknown, were found. But much publicity and interest was given to the proceedings by the presence of the principal witness, a handsome girl. "To the pluck, persistency, and intellect of Miss Porter," said the *Red Chief Recorder*, "Tuolumne County owes the discovery of the body. No one who was present at the inquest failed to be charmed with the appearance and conduct of this beautiful young lady. Miss Porter has but lately arrived in this district, in which, it is hoped, she will become an honoured resident, and continue to set an example to all lackadaisical and sentimental members of the so-called 'sterner sex.'" After this universally recognised allusion to Cass Beard, the *Recorder* returned to its record. "Some interest was excited by what appeared to be a clue to the mystery, in the discovery of a small gold engagement ring on the body. Evidence was afterwards offered to show it was the property of a Mr. Cass Beard of Blazing Star, who appeared upon the scene *after* the discovery of the corpse by Miss Porter. He alleged he had dropped it in lifting the unfortunate remains of the deceased. Much amusement was created in Court by the sentimental confusion of the claimant, and a certain partisan spirit shown by his fellow-miners of Blazing Star. It appearing, however, by the admission of this sighing Strephon of the Foot Hills, that he had himself *found* this pledge of affection, lying in the highway, six months previous, the coroner wisely placed it in the safe keeping of the County Court, until the appearance of the rightful owner."

Thus on the 13th of September, 186–, the treasure found at Blazing Star passed out of the hands of its finder.

. . . . . .

Autumn brought an abrupt explanation of the mystery. Kanaka Joe had been arrested for horse-stealing, but had with noble candour confessed to the finer offence of manslaughter. That swift and sure justice which overtook the horse-stealer in these altitudes was stayed a moment and hesitated, for the victim was clearly the mysterious unknown. Curiosity got the better of an extempore judge and jury.

"It was a fair fight," said the accused, not without some human vanity, feeling that the camp hung upon his words, "and was settled by the man az was peartest and liveliest with his weapon. We had a sort of unpleasantness over at Lagrange the night afore, along of our both hevin' a monotony of four aces. We had a clinch and a stamp around, and when we was separated it was only a question of shootin' on sight. He left Lagrange at sun-up the next morning, and I struck across a bit o' buckeye and underbrush and came upon him, accidental like, on the Red Chief Road. I drawed when I sighted him and called out. He slipped from his mare and covered himself with her flanks, reaching for his holster, but she rared and backed down on him across the road and into the grass, where I got in another shot and fetched him."

"And you stole his mare?" suggested the judge.

"I got away," said the gambler simply.

Further questioning only elicited the facts that Joe did not know the name or condition of his victim. He was a stranger in Lagrange.

It was a breezy afternoon, with some turbulency in the camp and much windy discussion over this unwonted delay of justice. The suggestion that Joe should be first hanged for horse-stealing and then tried for murder was angrily discussed, but milder counsels were offered—that the fact of the killing should be admitted only as proof of the theft.

A large party from Red Chief had come over to assist in judgment, among them the coroner.

Cass Beard had avoided these proceedings, which only recalled an unpleasant experience, and was wandering with pick, pan, and mallet far from the camp. These accoutrements, as I have before intimated, justified any form of aimless idleness under the equally aimless title of "prospecting." He had at the end of three hours' relaxation reached the highway to Red Chief, half hidden by blinding clouds of dust torn from the crumbling red road at every gust which swept down the mountain side. The spot had a familiar aspect to Cass, although some freshly-dug holes near the wayside, with scattered earth beside them, showed the presence of a recent prospector. He was struggling with his memory, when the dust was suddenly dispersed, and he found himself again at the scene of the murder. He started; he had not put foot on the road since the inquest. There lacked only the helpless dead man and the contrasting figure of the alert young woman to restore the picture. The body was gone, it was true; but as he turned he beheld Miss Porter, a few paces distant, sitting her horse as energetic and observant as on the first morning they had met. A superstitious thrill passed over him and awoke his old antagonism.

She nodded to him slightly. "I came here to refresh my memory," she said, "as Mr. Hornsby thought I might be asked to give my evidence again at Blazing Star."

Cass carelessly struck an aimless blow with his pick against the sod, and did not reply.

"And you?" she queried.

"*I* stumbled upon the place just now while prospecting, or I shouldn't be here."

"Then, it was *you* made these holes?"

"No," said Cass, with ill-concealed disgust. "Nobody but a stranger would go foolin' round such a spot."

He stopped, as the rude significance of his speech struck

him, and added surlily, "I mean—no one would dig here."

The girl laughed and showed a set of very white teeth in her square jaw. Cass averted his face.

"Do you mean to say that every miner doesn't know that it's lucky to dig wherever human blood has been spilt?"

Cass felt a return of his superstition, but he did not look up. "I never heard it before," he said severely.

"And you call yourself a California miner?"

"I do."

It was impossible for Miss Porter to misunderstand his curt speech and unsocial manner. She stared at him and coloured slightly. Lifting her reins lightly, she said, "You certainly do not seem like most of the miners I have met?"

"Nor you like any girl from the East I ever met," he responded.

"What do you mean?" she asked, checking her horse.

"What I say," he answered doggedly. Reasonable as this reply was, it immediately struck him that it was scarcely dignified or manly. But before he could explain himself Miss Porter was gone.

He met her again that very evening. The trial had been summarily suspended by the appearance of the Sheriff of Calaveras and his *posse*, who took Joe from that self-constituted tribunal of Blazing Star and set his face southward and towards authoritative although more cautious justice. But not before the evidence of the previous inquest had been read, and the incident of the ring again delivered to the public. It is said the prisoner burst into an incredulous laugh and asked to see this mysterious waif. It was handed to him. Standing in the very shadow of the gallows tree—which might have been one of the pines that sheltered the billiard-room in which the Vigilance Committee held their conclave—the

prisoner gave way to a burst of merriment, so genuine and honest that the judge and jury joined in automatic sympathy. When silence was restored, an explanation was asked by the judge. But there was no response from the prisoner except a subdued chuckle.

"Did this ring belong to you?" asked the judge severely; the jury and spectators craning their ears forward with an expectant smile already on their faces. But the prisoner's eyes only sparkled maliciously as he looked around the court.

"Tell us, Joe," said a sympathetic and laughter-loving juror under his breath; "let it out, and we'll make it easy for you."

"Prisoner," said the judge, with a return of official dignity, "remember that your life is in peril. Do you refuse?"

Joe lazily laid his arm on the back of his chair with (to quote the words of an animated observer) "the air of having a Christian hope and a sequence flush in his hand," and said, "Well, as I reckon I'm not up yer for stealin' a ring that another man lets on to have found, and as fur as I kin see hez nothin' to do with the case, *I do!*" And as it was here that the Sheriff of Calaveras made a precipitate entry into the room, the mystery remained unsolved.

The effect of this freshly-imported ridicule on the sensitive mind of Cass might have been foretold by Blazing Star had it ever taken that sensitiveness into consideration. He had lost the good-humour and easy pliability which had tempted him to frankness, and he had gradually become bitter and hard. He had at first affected amusement over his own vanished day-dream—hiding his virgin disappointment in his own breast—but when he began to turn upon his feelings, he turned upon his comrades also. Cass was for a while unpopular. There is no ingratitude so revolting to the human mind as that of the butt who refuses to

be one any longer. The man who rejects that immunity which laughter generally casts upon him, and demands to be seriously considered, deserves no mercy.

It was under these hard conditions that Cass Beard, convicted of overt sentimentalism aggravated by inconsistency, stepped into the Red Chief Coach that evening. It was his habit usually to ride with the driver, but the presence of Hornsby and Miss Porter on the box-seat changed his intention. Yet, he had the satisfaction of seeing that neither had noticed him; and as there was no other passenger inside, he stretched himself on the cushion of the back seat and gave way to moody reflections. He quite determined to leave Blazing Star, to settle himself seriously to the task of money-getting, and to return to his comrades, some day, a sarcastic, cynical, successful man, and so overwhelm them with confusion. For poor Cass had not yet reached that superiority of knowing that success would depend upon his ability to forego his past. Indeed, part of his boyhood had been cast among these men, and he was not old enough to have learnt that success was not to be gauged by their standard. The moon lit up the dark interior of the coach with a faint poetic light. The lazy swinging of the vehicle that was bearing him away—albeit only for a night and a day—the solitude, the glimpses from the window of great distances full of vague possibilities, made the abused ring potent as that of Gyges. He dreamed with his eyes open. From an Alnaschar vision he suddenly awoke. The coach had stopped. The voices of men—one in entreaty, one in expostulation—came from the box. Cass mechanically put his hand to his pistol pocket.

"Thank you, but I *insist* upon getting down."

It was Miss Porter's voice. This was followed by a rapid, half-restrained interchange of words between Hornsby and the driver. Then the latter said gruffly—

"If the lady wants to ride inside, let her."

Miss Porter fluttered to the ground. She was followed

by Hornsby. "Just a minit, Miss," he expostulated, half shamedly, half brusquely, "ye don't onderstand me. I only"——

But Miss Porter had jumped into the coach.

Hornsby placed his hand on the handle of the door. Miss Porter grasped it firmly from the inside. There was a slight struggle.

All of which was part of a dream to the boyish Cass. But he awoke from it—a man! "Do you," he asked, in a voice he scarcely recognised himself—"do you want this man inside?"

"No!"

Cass caught at Hornsby's wrist like a young tiger. But alas! what availed instinctive chivalry against main strength. He only succeeded in forcing the door open in spite of Miss Porter's superior strategy—and, I fear I must add, muscle also—and threw himself passionately at Hornsby's throat, where he hung on and calmly awaited dissolution. But he had, in the onset, driven Hornsby out into the road and the moonlight.

"Here! Somebody take my lines." The voice was "Mountain Charley's"—the driver. The figure that jumped from the box and separated the struggling men belonged to this singularly direct person.

"You're riding inside?" said Charley interrogatively, to Cass. Before he could reply Miss Porter's voice came from the window.

"He is!"

Charley promptly bundled Cass into the coach.

"And *you?*" to Hornsby; "onless you're kalkilatin' to take a little 'pasear,' you're booked *outside.* Get up."

It is probable that Charley assisted Mr. Hornsby as promptly to his seat, for the next moment the coach was rolling on.

Meanwhile Cass, by reason of his forced entry, had been deposited in Miss Porter's lap, whence, freeing himself, he

had attempted to climb over the middle seat, but in the starting of the coach was again thrown heavily against her hat and shoulder; all of which was inconsistent with the attitude of dignified reserve he had intended to display. Miss Porter, meanwhile, recovered her good humour.

"What a brute he was, ugh!" she said, re-tying the ribbons of her bonnet under her square chin, and smoothing out her linen duster.

Cass tried to look as if he had forgotten the whole affair. "Who? oh, yes! I see!" he responded absently.

"I suppose I ought to thank you," she went on with a smile, "but you know, really, I *could* have kept him out if you hadn't pulled his wrist from outside. I'll show you. Look! Put your hand on the handle there! Now, I'll hold the lock inside firmly. You see, you can't turn the catch!"

She indeed held the lock fast. It was a firm hand, yet soft—their fingers had touched over the handle—and looked white in the moonlight. He made no reply, but sank back again in his seat with a singular sensation in the fingers that had touched hers. He was in the shadow, and, without being seen, could abandon his reserve and glance at her face. It struck him that he had never really seen her before. She was not so tall as she had appeared to be. Her eyes were not large, but her pupils were black, moist, velvety, and so convex as to seem embossed on the white. She had an indistinctive nose, a rather colourless face—whiter at the angles of the mouth and nose through the relief of tiny freckles like grains of pepper. Her mouth was straight, dark red, but moist as her eyes. She had drawn herself into the corner of the back seat, her wrist put through and hanging over the swinging strap, the easy lines of her plump figure swaying from side to side with the motion of the coach. Finally, forgetful of any presence in the dark corner opposite, she threw her head a little further back, slipped a trifle lower, and, placing two well-booted

feet upon the middle seat, completed a charming and wholesome picture.

Five minutes elapsed. She was looking straight at the moon. Cass Beard felt his dignified reserve becoming very much like awkwardness. He ought to be coldly polite.

"I hope you're not flustered, Miss, by the—by the"—— he began.

"I?" She straightened herself up in the seat, cast a curious glance into the dark corner, and then letting herself down again said, "Oh, dear, no!"

Another five minutes elapsed. She had evidently forgotten him. She might at least have been civil. He took refuge again in his reserve. But it was now mixed with a certain pique.

Yet, how much softer her face looked in the moonlight! Even her square jaw had lost that hard, matter-of-fact, practical indication which was so distasteful to him, and always had suggested a harsh criticism of his weakness. How moist her eyes were—actually shining in the light! How that light seemed to concentrate in the corner of the lashes, and then slipped—a flash—away. Was she? —yes, she was crying.

Cass melted. He moved. Miss Porter put her head out of the window and drew it back in a moment, dry-eyed.

"One meets all sorts of folks travelling," said Cass with what he wished to make appear a cheerful philosophy.

"I dare say. I don't know. I never before met any one who was rude to me. I have travelled all over the country alone, and with all kinds of people, ever since I was so high. I have always gone my own way—without hindrance or trouble. I always do. I don't see why I shouldn't. Perhaps other people mayn't like it. I do. I like excitement. I like to see all that there is to see.

Because I'm a girl, I don't see why I cannot go out without a keeper, or why I cannot do what any *man* can do that isn't wrong; do you? Perhaps you like a girl to be always in the house dawdling, or thumping a piano, or reading novels. Perhaps you think I'm bold because I don't like it, and won't lie and say I do."

She spoke sharply and aggressively, and so evidently in answer to Cass's unspoken indictment against her, that he was not surprised when she became more direct.

"You know you were shocked when I went to fetch that Hornsby, the coroner, after we found the dead body."

"Hornsby wasn't shocked," said Cass, a little viciously.

"What do you mean?" she said abruptly.

"You were good friends enough, until"——

"Until he insulted me just now, is that it?"

"Until he thought," stammered Cass, "that because you were—you know—not so—so—so careful as other girls, he could be a little freer."

"And so because I preferred to ride a mile with him to see something real that had happened, and tried to be useful instead of looking in shop windows in Main Street or promenading before the hotel"——

"And being ornamental"—— interrupted Cass. But this feeble and un-Cass-like attempt at playful gallantry met with a sudden check.

Miss Porter drew herself together, and looked out of the window. "Do you wish me to walk the rest of the way home?"

"No," said Cass hurriedly, with a crimson face, and a sense of gratuitous rudeness.

"Then stop that kind of talk, right there!"

There was an awkward silence. "I wish I was a man," she said half-bitterly, half-earnestly. Cass Beard was not old and cynical enough to observe that this devout aspiration is usually uttered by those who have least reason to deplore their own femininity; and, but for the rebuff he

had just received, would have made the usual emphatic dissent of our sex when the wish is uttered by warm red lips and tender voices—a dissent, it may be remarked, generally withheld, however, when the masculine spinster dwells on the perfection of woman. I dare say Miss Porter was sincere, for a moment later she continued poutingly—

"And yet, I used to go to fires in Sacramento when I was only ten years old. I saw the theatre burnt down. Nobody found fault with me then."

Something made Cass ask if her father and mother objected to her boyish tastes. The reply was characteristic if not satisfactory—

"Object? I'd like to see them do it!"

The direction of the road had changed. The fickle moon now abandoned Miss Porter and sought out Cass on the front seat. It caressed the young fellow's silky moustache and long eyelashes, and took some of the sunburn from his cheek.

"What's the matter with your neck?" said the girl suddenly.

Cass looked down, blushing to find that the collar of his smart "duck" sailor shirt was torn open. But something more than his white, soft, girlish skin was exposed; the shirt front was dyed quite red with blood from a slight cut on the shoulder. He remembered to have felt a scratch while struggling with Hornsby.

The girl's soft eyes sparkled. "Let *me*," she said vivaciously; "do! I'm good at wounds. Come over here. No—stay there. I'll come over to you."

She did, bestriding the back of the middle seat and dropping at his side. The magnetic fingers again touched his; he felt her warm breath on his neck as she bent towards him.

"It's nothing," he said hastily, more agitated by the treatment than by the wound.

"Give me your flask," she responded without heeding. A stinging sensation, as she bathed the edges of the cut with the spirit, brought him back to common-sense again. "There!" she said, skilfully extemporising a bandage from her handkerchief and a compress from his cravat. "Now, button your coat over your chest, so, and don't take cold." She insisted upon buttoning it for him; greater even than the feminine delight in a man's strength is the ministration to his weakness. Yet, when this was finished, she drew a little away from him in some embarrassment—an embarrassment she wondered at, as his skin was finer, his touch gentler, his clothes cleaner, and—not to put too fine a point upon it—he exhaled an atmosphere much sweeter than belonged to most of the men her boyish habits had brought her in contact with—not excepting her own father. Later she even exempted her mother from the possession of this divine effluence. After a moment she asked suddenly, "What are you going to do with Hornsby?"

Cass had not thought of him. His short-lived rage was past with the occasion that provoked it. Without any fear of his adversary, he would have been quite willing to meet him no more. He only said, "That will depend upon *him*."

"Oh, you won't hear from him again," said she confidently; "but you really ought to get up a little more muscle. You've no more than a girl." She stopped, a little confused.

"What shall I do with your handkerchief?" asked the uneasy Cass, anxious to change the subject.

"Oh, keep it, if you want to; only, don't show it to everybody, as you did that ring you found." Seeing signs of distress in his face, she added: "Of course that was all nonsense. If you had cared so much for the ring, you couldn't have talked about it or shown it. Could you?"

It relieved him to think that this might be true; he certainly had not looked at it in that light before.

"But, *did* you really find it?" she asked with sudden gravity. "Really now?"

"Yes."

"And there was no real May in the case?"

"Not that I know of," laughed Cass, secretly pleased.

But Miss Porter, after eyeing him critically for a moment, jumped up and climbed back again to her seat. "Perhaps you had better give me that handkerchief back."

Cass began to unbutton his coat.

"No! no! do you want to take your death of cold?" she screamed. And Cass, to avoid this direful possibility, rebuttoned his coat again over the handkerchief and a peculiarly pleasing sensation.

Very little now was said until the rattling, bounding descent of the coach denoted the approach to Red Chief. The straggling main street disclosed itself, light by light. In the flash of glittering windows and the sound of eager voices Miss Porter descended, without waiting for Cass's proffered assistance, and anticipated Mountain Charley's descent from the box. A few undistinguishable words passed between them.

"You kin freeze to me, Miss," said Charley; and Miss Porter, turning her frank laugh and frankly opened palm to Cass, half-returned the pressure of his hand, and slipped away.

CHAPTER II.

A FEW days after the stage-coach incident, Mountain Charley drew up beside Cass on the Blazing Star turnpike, and handed him a small packet. "I was told to give ye that by Miss Porter. Hush—listen! It's that rather old doggoned ring o' yours that's bin in all the papers. She's bamboozled that sap-headed County Judge, Boompointer, into givin' it to her. Take my advice, and sling it away for

some other feller to pick up and get looney over. That's all!"

"Did she say anything?" asked Cass anxiously, as he received his lost treasure somewhat coldly.

"Well, yes! I reckon. She asked me to stand betwixt Hornsby and you. So don't *you* tackle him, and I'll see *he* don't tackle you," and with a portentous wink Mountain Charley whipped up his horses and was gone.

Cass opened the packet. It contained nothing but the ring. Unmitigated by any word of greeting, remembrance, or even raillery, it seemed almost an insult. Had she intended to flaunt his folly in his face, or had she believed he still mourned for it, and deemed its recovery a sufficient reward for his slight service? For an instant he felt tempted to follow Charley's advice, and cast this symbol of folly and contempt in the dust of the mountain road. And had she not made his humiliation complete by begging Charley's interference between him and his enemy? He would go home and send her back the handkerchief she had given him. But here the unromantic reflection that, although he had washed it that very afternoon in the solitude of his own cabin, he could not possibly *iron* it, but must send it "rough-dried," stayed his indignant feet.

Two or three days, a week, a fortnight even of this hopeless resentment filled Cass's breast. Then the news of Kanaka Joe's acquittal in the State Court momentarily revived the story of the ring, and revamped a few stale jokes in the camp. But the interest soon flagged; the fortunes of the little community of Blazing Star had been for some months failing; and with early snows in the mountain and wasted capital in fruitless schemes on the river, there was little room for the indulgence of that lazy and original humour which belonged to their lost youth and prosperity. Blazing Star truly, in the grim figure of their slang, was "played out." Not dug out, worked out,

or washed out, but dissipated in a year of speculation and chance.

Against this tide of fortune Cass struggled manfully, and even evoked the slow praise of his companions. Better still, he won a certain praise for himself, in himself, in a consciousness of increased strength, health, power, and self-reliance. He began to turn his quick imagination and perception to some practical account, and made one or two discoveries which quite startled his more experienced but more conservative companions. Nevertheless, Cass's discoveries and labours were not of a kind that produced immediate pecuniary realisation, and Blazing Star, which consumed so many pounds of pork and flour daily, did not, unfortunately, produce the daily equivalent in gold. Blazing Star lost its credit. Blazing Star was hungry, dirty, and ragged. Blazing Star was beginning to set.

Participating in the general ill-luck of the camp, Cass was not without his own individual mischances. He had resolutely determined to forget Miss Porter and all that tended to recall the unlucky ring, but, cruelly enough, she was the only thing that refused to be forgotten—whose undulating figure reclined opposite to him in the weird moonlight of his ruined cabin, whose voice mingled with the song of the river by whose banks he toiled, and whose eyes and touch thrilled him in his dreams. Partly for this reason, and partly because his clothes were beginning to be patched and torn, he avoided Red Chief and any place where he would be likely to meet her. In spite of this precaution, he had once seen her driving in a pony carriage, but so smartly and fashionably dressed that he drew back in the cover of a wayside willow that she might pass without recognition. He looked down upon his red-splashed clothes and grimy soil-streaked hands, and for a moment half hated her. His comrades seldom spoke of her—instinctively fearing some temptation that might beset his Spartan resolutions; but he heard from time

to time that she had been seen at balls and parties apparently enjoying those very frivolities of her sex she affected to condemn. It was a Sabbath morning in early spring that he was returning from an ineffectual attempt to enlist a capitalist at the county town to redeem the fortunes of Blazing Star. He was pondering over the narrowness of that capitalist, who had evidently but illogically connected Cass's present appearance with the future of that struggling camp, when he became so footsore that he was obliged to accept a "lift" from a wayfaring teamster. As the slowly lumbering vehicle passed the new church on the outskirts of the town, the congregation were sallying forth. It was too late to jump down and run away, and Cass dared not ask his new-found friend to whip up his cattle. Conscious of his unshorn beard and ragged garments, he kept his eyes fixed upon the road. A voice that thrilled him called his name. It was Miss Porter, a resplendent vision of silk laces and Easter flowers—yet actually running, with something of her old dash and freedom, beside the waggon. As the astonished teamster drew up before this elegant apparition, she panted—

"Why did you make me run so far? and why didn't you look up?"

Cass, trying to hide the patches on his knees beneath a newspaper, stammered that he had not seen her.

"And you did not hold down your head purposely?"

"No," said Cass.

"Why have you not been to Red Chief? Why didn't you answer my message about the ring?" she asked swiftly.

"You sent nothing but the ring," said Cass, colouring, as he glanced at the teamster.

"Why, *that* was a message, you born idiot!"

Cass stared. The teamster smiled. Miss Porter gazed anxiously at the waggon. "I think I'd like a ride in there, it looks awfully good." She glanced mischiev-

ously around at the lingering and curious congregation. "May I?"

But Cass deprecated that proceeding strongly. It was dirty, he was not sure it was even *wholesome;* she would be *so* uncomfortable; he himself was only going a few rods farther, and in that time she might ruin her dress——

"Oh yes," she said a little bitterly, "certainly, my dress must be looked after. And—what else?"

"People might think it strange, and believe I had invited you," continued Cass hesitatingly.

"When I had only invited myself? Thank you. Good-bye."

She waved her hand and stepped back from the waggon. Cass would have given worlds to recall her, but he sat still in moody silence, and the vehicle moved on. At the first cross road he jumped down. "Thank you," he said to the teamster. "You're welcome," returned that gentleman, regarding him curiously, "but the next time a gal like that asks to ride in this yer waggon, I reckon I won't take the vote of any deadhead passenger. *Adios*, young fellow. Don't stay out late; ye might be run off by some gal, and what would your mother say?" Of course the young man could only look unutterable things and walk away, but even in that dignified action he was conscious that its effect was somewhat mitigated by a large patch from a material originally used as a flour-sack, which had repaired his trousers, but still bore the ironical legend "Best Superfine."

The summer brought warmth and promise and some blossom, if not absolute fruition, to Blazing Star. The long days drew Nature into closer communion with the men, and hopefulness followed the discontent of their winter seclusion. It was easier, too, for capital to be wooed and won into making a picnic in these mountain solitudes than when high water stayed the fords, and drifting snow the Sierran trails. At the close of one of these Arcadian

days Cass was smoking before the door of his lonely cabin when he was astounded by the onset of a dozen of his companions. Peter Drummond, far in the van, was waving a newspaper like a victorious banner. "All's right now, Cass, old man!" he panted, as he stopped before Cass and shoved back his eager followers.

"What's all right?" asked Cass dubiously.

"*You!* You kin rake down the pile now. You're hunky. You're on velvet. Listen!"

He opened the newspaper, and read, with annoying deliberation, as follows :—

"LOST.—If the finder of a plain gold ring, bearing the engraved inscription, 'May to Cass,' alleged to have been picked up on the high-road near Blazing Star, on the 4th March 186–, will apply to Bookham & Sons, bankers, No. 1007 Y Street, Sacramento, he will be suitably rewarded either for the recovery of the ring, or for such facts as may identify it, or the locality where it was found."

Cass rose and frowned savagely on his comrades. "No! no!" cried a dozen voices assuringly. "It's all right! Honest Injin! True as gospel! No joke, Cass!"

"Here's the paper, *Sacramento Union* of yesterday. Look for yourself," said Drummond, handing him the well-worn journal. "And you see," he added, "how darned lucky you are. It ain't necessary for you to produce the ring, so if that old biled owl of a Boompointer don't giv' it back to ye, it's all the same."

"And they say nobody but the finder need apply," interrupted another. "That shuts out Boompointer or Kanaka Joe, for the matter o' that."

"It's clar that it *means* you, Cass, ez much ez if they'd given your name," added a third.

For Miss Porter's sake and his own, Cass had never told them of the restoration of the ring, and it was evident that Mountain Charley had also kept silent. Cass could not speak now without violating a secret, and he was pleased

that the ring itself no longer played an important part in the mystery. But what was that mystery, and why was the ring secondary to himself? Why was so much stress laid upon his finding it?

"You see," said Drummond, as if answering his unspoken thought, "that 'ar gal—for it is a girl in course—hez read all about it in the papers, and hez sort o' took a shine to ye. It don't make a bit o' difference who in thunder Cass *is* or *waz*, for I reckon she's kicked him over by this time"——

"Sarved him right, too, for losing the girl's ring, and then lying low and keeping dark about it," interrupted a sympathiser.

"And she's just weakened over the romantic, high-toned way you stuck to it," continued Drummond, forgetting the sarcasms he had previously hurled at this romance. Indeed, the whole camp, by this time, had become convinced that it had fostered and developed a chivalrous devotion which was now on the point of pecuniary realisation. It was generally accepted that "she" was the daughter of this banker, and it was also felt that in the circumstances the happy father could not do less than develop the resources of Blazing Star at once. Even if there were no relationship, what opportunity could be more fit for presenting to capital a locality that even produced engagement-rings, and, as Jim Faquier put it, "the men ez knew how to keep 'em." It was this sympathetic Virginian who took Cass aside with the following generous suggestion: "If you find that you and the old gal couldn't hitch hosses, owin' to your not likin' red hair or a game leg" (it may be here recorded that Blazing Star had, for no reason whatever, attributed these unprepossessing qualities to the mysterious advertiser), "you might let ME in. You might say ez how I used to jest worship that ring with you, and allers wanted to borrow it on Sundays. If anything comes of it—why—*we're pardners!*"

A serious question was the outfitting of Cass for what now was felt to be a diplomatic representation of the community. His garments, it hardly need be said, were inappropriate to any wooing except that of the "maiden all forlorn," which the advertiser clearly was not. "He might," suggested Faquier, "drop in jest as he is—kinder as if he'd got keerless of the world, being love-sick." But Cass objected strongly, and was borne out in his objection by his younger comrades. At last a pair of white duck trousers, a red shirt, a flowing black silk scarf, and a Panama hat were procured at Red Chief, on credit, after a judicious exhibition of the advertisement. A heavy wedding-ring—the property of Drummond (who was not married)—was also lent as a graceful suggestion, and at the last moment Fauquier affixed to Cass's scarf an enormous specimen pin of gold and quartz. "It sorter indicates the auriferous wealth o' this yer region, and the old man (the senior member of Bookham & Sons) needn't know I won it at drawpoker in 'Frisco," said Fauquier.

"Ef you 'pass' on the gal, you kin hand it back to me and *I'll* try it on." Forty dollars for expenses was put into Cass's hands, and the entire community accompanied him to the cross roads where he was to meet the Sacramento coach, which eventually carried him away, followed by a benediction of waving hats and exploding revolvers.

That Cass did not participate in the extravagant hopes of his comrades, and that he rejected utterly their matrimonial speculations in his behalf, need not be said. Outwardly, he kept his own counsel with good-humoured assent. But there was something fascinating in the situation, and while he felt he had for ever abandoned his romantic dream, he was not displeased to know that it might have proved a reality. Nor was it distasteful to him to think that Miss Porter would hear of it and regret her late inability to appreciate his sentiment. If he really were the object of some opulent maiden's passion, he

would show Miss Porter how he could sacrifice the most brilliant prospects for her sake. Alone, on the top of the coach, he projected one of those satisfying conversations in which imaginative people delight, but which unfortunately never come quite up to rehearsal, "Dear Miss Porter," he would say, addressing the back of the driver, "if I could remain faithful to a dream of my youth, however illusive and unreal, can you believe that for the sake of lucre I could be false to the one real passion that alone supplanted it?" In the composition and delivery of this eloquent statement, an hour was happily forgotten; the only drawback to its complete effect was that a misplacing of epithets in rapid repetition did not seem to make the slightest difference, and Cass found himself saying, "Dear Miss Porter, if I could be false to a dream of my youth, &c., &c., can you believe I could be *faithful* to the one real passion, &c., &c.," with equal and perfect satisfaction. As Miss Porter was reputed to be well off — if the unknown were poor, that might be another drawback.

The banking-house of Bookham & Sons did not present an illusive nor mysterious appearance. It was eminently practical and matter-of-fact; it was obtrusively open and glassy; nobody would have thought of leaving a secret there that would have been inevitably circulated over the counter. Cass felt an uncomfortable sense of incongruity in himself, in his story, in his treasure, to this temple of disenchanting realism. With the awkwardness of an embarrassed man, he was holding prominently in his hand an envelope containing the ring and advertisement as a voucher for his intrusion, when the nearest clerk took the envelope from his hand, opened it, took out the ring, returned it, said briskly, "T'other shop next door, young man," and turned to another customer.

Cass stepped to the door, saw that "T'other shop" was a pawnbroker's and returned again with a flashing

eye and heightened colour. "It's an advertisement I have come to answer," he began again.

The clerk cast a glance at Cass's scarf and pin. "Place taken yesterday—no room for any more," he said abruptly.

Cass grew quite white. But his old experience in Blazing Star repartee stood him in good stead. "If it's *your* place you mean," he said coolly, "I reckon you might put a dozen men in the hole you're rattlin' round in—but it's this advertisement I'm after. If Bookham isn't in, may be you'll send me one of the grown-up sons." The production of the advertisement and some laughter from the bystanders had its effect. The pert young clerk retired and returned to lead the way to the bank parlour. Cass's heart sank again as he was confronted by a dark, iron-grey man—in dress, features, speech, and action, uncompromisingly opposed to Cass, his ring and his romance. When the young man had told his story and produced his treasure, he paused. The banker scarcely glanced at it, but said impatiently—

"Well—your papers?"

"My papers?"

"Yes. Proof of your identity. You say your name is Cass Beard. Good! What have you got to prove it? How can I tell who you are?"

To a sensitive man, there is no form of suspicion that is as bewildering and demoralising, at the moment, as the question of his identity. Cass felt the insult in the doubt of his word, and the palpable sense of his present inability to prove it. The banker watched him keenly but not unkindly.

"Come," he said at length, "this is not *my* affair; if you can legally satisfy the lady for whom I am only agent, well and good. I believe you *can;* I only warn you that you *must.* And my present inquiry was to keep her from losing her time with impostors—a class I don't think *you* belong to. There's her card. Good day."

"Miss Mortimer." It was *not* the banker's daughter. The first illusion of Blazing Star was rudely dispelled. But the care taken by the capitalist to shield her from imposture indicated a person of wealth. Of her youth and beauty Cass no longer thought.

The address given was not distant. With a beating heart, he rang the bell of a respectable-looking house, and was ushered into a private drawing-room. Instinctively he felt that the room was only temporarily inhabited—an air peculiar to the best lodgings—and when the door opened upon a tall lady in deep mourning, he was still more convinced of an incongruity between the occupant and her surroundings. With a smile that vacillated between a habit of familiarity and ease, and a recent restraint, she motioned him to a chair.

"Miss Mortimer" was still young, still handsome, still fashionably dressed, and still attractive. From her first greeting to the end of the interview, Cass felt that she knew all about him. This relieved him from the onus of proving his identity, but seemed to put him vaguely at a disadvantage. It increased his sense of inexperience and youthfulness.

"I hope you will believe," she began, "that the few questions I have to ask you are to satisfy my own heart, and for no other purpose." She smiled sadly, as she went on. "Had it been otherwise, I should have instituted a legal inquiry, and left this interview to some one cooler, calmer, and less interested than myself. But I think I—*know*—I can trust you. Perhaps we women are weak and foolish to talk of an *instinct;* and when you know my story, you may have reason to believe that but little dependence can be placed on *that;* but I am not wrong in saying—am I?"—(with a sad smile)—"that *you* are not above that weakness?" She paused, closed her lips tightly, and grasped her hands before her. "You say you found that ring in the road some three months

before—the—the—you know what I mean—the body—was discovered."

"Yes."

"You thought it might have been dropped by some one in passing?"

"I thought so—yes—it belonged to no one in camp."

"Before your cabin, or on the highway?"

"Before my cabin."

"You are *sure?*" There was something so very sweet and sad in her smile, that it oddly made Cass colour.

"But my cabin is near the road," he suggested.

"I see! And there was nothing else; no paper nor envelope?"

"Nothing."

"And you kept it because of the odd resemblance one of the names bore to yours?"

"Yes."

"For no other reason?"

"None." Yet Cass felt he was blushing.

"You'll forgive my repeating a question you have already answered, but I am *so* anxious. There was some attempt to prove at the inquest that the ring had been found on the body of—the unfortunate man. But you tell me it was not so?"

"I can swear it."

"Good God—the traitor!" She took a hurried step forwards, turned to the window, and then came back to Cass with a voice broken with emotion. "I have told you I could trust you. That ring was mine!"

She stopped, and then went on hurriedly. "Years ago I gave it to a man who deceived and wronged me; a man whose life since then has been a shame and disgrace to all who knew him; a man who, once a gentleman, sank so low as to become the associate of thieves and ruffians; sank so low, that when he died by violence—a traitor even to them—his own confederates shrunk from

him, and left him to fill a nameless grave. That man's body you found!"

Cass started. "And his name was?"——

"Part of your surname. Cass—Henry Cass."

"You see why Providence seems to have brought that ring to you," she went on. "But you ask me why, knowing this, I am so eager to know if the ring was found by you in the road, or if it were found on his body. Listen! it is part of my mortification that the story goes that this man once showed this ring, boasted of it, staked and lost it at a gambling-table to one of his vile comrades."

"Kanaka Joe," said Cass, overcome by a vivid recollection of Joe's merriment at the trial.

"The same. Don't you see," she said hurriedly, "if the ring had been found on him, I could believe that somewhere in his heart he still kept respect for the woman he had wronged. I am a woman — a foolish woman, I know — but you have crushed that hope for ever."

"But why have you sent for me?" asked Cass, touched by her emotion.

"To know it for certain," she said, almost fiercely. "Can you not understand that a woman like me must know a thing once and for ever? But you *can* help me. I did not send for you only to pour my wrongs in your ears. You must take me with you to this place —to the spot where you found the ring, to the spot where you found the body—to the spot where—where *he* lies. You must do it secretly, that none shall know me."

Cass hesitated. He was thinking of his companions, and the collapse of their painted bubble; how could he keep the secret from them?

"If it is money you need, let not that stop you. I have no right to your time without recompense. Do not mis-

understand me. There has been a thousand dollars awaiting my order at Bookham's when the ring should be delivered. It shall be doubled if you help me in this last moment."

It was possible. He could convey her secretly there; invent some story of a reward delayed for want of proofs, and afterwards share that reward with his friends. He answered promptly, "I will take you there."

She took his hands in both of hers, raised them to her lips, and smiled. The shadow of grief and restraint seemed to have fallen from her face, and a half-mischievous, half-coquettish gleam in her dark eyes touched the susceptible Cass in so subtle a fashion that he regained the street in some confusion. He wondered what Miss Porter would have thought. But was he not returning to her, a fortunate man with a thousand dollars in his pocket? Why should he remember that he was handicapped by a pretty woman and a pathetic episode? It did not make the proximity less pleasant as he helped her into the coach that evening, nor did the recollection of another ride with another woman obtrude itself upon those consolations which he felt it his duty from time to time to offer. It was arranged that he should leave her at the "Red Chief" Hotel, while he continued on to Blazing Star, returning at noon to bring her with him when he could do it without exposing her to recognition. The grey dawn came soon enough, and the coach drew up at "Red Chief" while the lights in the bar-room and dining-room of the hotel were still struggling with the far-flushing East. Cass alighted, placed Miss Mortimer in the hands of the landlady, and returned to the vehicle. It was still musty, close, and frowsy, with half-awakened passengers. There was a vacated seat on the top, which Cass climbed up to, and abstractedly threw himself beside a figure muffled in shawls and rugs. There was a slight movement among the multitudinous enwrappings, and then the figure turned

to him and said drily: "Good morning!" It was Miss Porter!

"Have you been long here?" he stammered.

"All night."

He would have given worlds to leave her at that moment. He would have jumped from the starting coach to save himself any explanation of the embarrassment he was furiously conscious of showing, without, as he believed, any adequate cause. And yet, like all inexperienced sensitive men, he dashed blindly into that explanation; worse, he even told his secret at once, then and there, and then sat abashed and conscience-stricken, with an added sense of its utter futility.

"And this," summed up the young girl, with a slight shrug of her pretty shoulders, "is *your May?*" Cass would have recommenced his story. "No, don't, pray! It isn't interesting, nor original. Do *you* believe it?"

"I do," said Cass indignantly.

"How lucky! Then, let me go to sleep."

Cass, still furious, but uneasy, did not again address her. When the coach stopped at Blazing Star she asked him indifferently, "When does this sentimental pilgrimage begin?"

"I return for her at one o'clock," replied Cass stiffly.

He kept his word. He appeased his eager companions with a promise of future fortune, and exhibited the present and tangible reward. By a circuitous route, known only to himself, he led Miss Mortimer to the road before the cabin. There was a pink flush of excitement on her somewhat faded cheek.

"And it was here?" she asked eagerly.

"I found it here."

"And the body?"

"That was afterwards. Over in that direction, beyond the clump of buckeyes, on the Red Chief turnpike."

"And any one coming from the road we left just now,

and going to—to—that place, would have to cross just here? Tell me," she said, with a strange laugh, laying her cold nervous hand on his, "Wouldn't they?"

"They would."

"Let us go to that place."

Cass stepped out briskly to avoid observation and gain the woods beyond the highway. "You have crossed here before," she said; "there seems to be a trail."

"I may have made it; it's a short cut to the buckeyes."

"You never found anything else on the trail?"

"You remember, I told you before, the ring was all I found."

"Ah, true!" she smiled sweetly; "it was *that* which made it seem so odd to you, I forgot."

In half-an-hour they reached the buckeyes. During the walk she had taken rapid cognisance of everything in her path. When they crossed the road, and Cass had pointed out the scene of the murder, she looked anxiously around. "You are sure we are not seen?"

"Quite."

"You will not think me foolish if I ask you to wait here while I go in there"—she pointed to the ominous thicket near them—"alone?" She was quite white.

Cass's heart, which had grown somewhat cold since his interview with Miss Porter, melted at once.

"Go; I will stay here!"

He waited five minutes. She did not return. What if the poor creature had determined upon suicide on the spot where her faithless lover had fallen? He was reassured in another moment by the rustle of skirts in the undergrowth.

"I was becoming quite alarmed," he said aloud.

"You have reason to be," returned a hurried voice. He started. It was Miss Porter, who stepped swiftly out of the cover. "Look," she said, "look at that man down the road. He has been tracking you two ever since you left the cabin. Do you know who he is?"

"No."

"Then, listen. It is Three-fingered Dick, one of the escaped road agents. I know him!"

"Let us go and warn her," said Cass eagerly.

Miss Porter laid her hand upon his shoulder. "I don't think she'll thank you," she said drily. "Perhaps you'd better see what she's doing, first."

Utterly bewildered, yet with a strong sense of the masterfulness of his companion, he followed her. She crept like a cat through the thicket. Suddenly she paused. "Look!" she whispered viciously, "look at the tender vigils of your heart-broken May!"

Cass saw the woman who had left him a moment before, on her knees on the grass, with long thin fingers digging like a ghoul in the earth. He had scarce time to notice her eager face and eyes cast now and then back towards the spot where she had left him, before there was a crash in the bushes, and a man—the stranger of the road—leaped to her side. "Run," he said, "run for it, now. You're watched!"

"Oh! that man Beard!" she said contemptuously.

"No, another—in a waggon! Quick! Fool! you know the place now—you can come later; run!" And half-dragging, half-lifting her, he bore her through the bushes. Scarcely had they closed behind the pair, than Miss Porter ran to the spot vacated by the woman. "Look!" she cried triumphantly; "look!"

Cass looked, and sank on his knees beside her.

"It *was* worth a thousand dollars—wasn't it?" she repeated maliciously—"wasn't it? But you ought to return it—*really*, you ought."

Cass could scarcely articulate. "But how did *you* know it?" he finally gasped.

"Oh, I suspected something: there was a woman, and, you know, you're *such* a fool."

Cass rose stiffly.

"Don't be a greater fool now, but go and bring my horse and waggon from the hill, and don't say anything to the driver."

"Then you did not come alone?"

"No—it would have been bold and improper."

"Please!"

"And to think it *was* the ring, after all, that pointed to this!" she said.

"The ring that *you* returned to me!"

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Don't—please—the waggon is coming."

. . . . . .

In the next morning's edition of the *Red Chief Chronicle* appeared the following startling intelligence—

"EXTRAORDINARY DISCOVERY!

FINDING OF THE STOLEN TREASURE OF WELLS, FARGO & CO.

OVER $300,000 RECOVERED!

"Our readers will remember the notorious robbery of Wells, Fargo & Co's. treasure from the Sacramento and Red Chief Pioneer Coach on the night of September 1. Although most of the gang were arrested, it is known that two escaped, who, it was presumed, *cached* the treasure, amounting to nearly $500,000, in gold, drafts, and jewellery, as no trace of the property was found. Yesterday our esteemed fellow-citizen, Mr. Cass Beard, long and favourably known in this county, succeeded in exhuming the treasure in a copse of hazel near the Red Chief turnpike—adjacent to the spot where an unknown body was lately discovered. This body is now strongly suspected to be that of one Henry Cass, a disreputable character, who has since been ascertained to have been one of the road-

agents who escaped. The matter is now under legal investigation. The successful result of the search is due to a systematic plan evolved from the genius of Mr. Beard, who has devoted over a year to this labour. It was first suggested to him by the finding of a ring, now definitely identified as part of the treasure, which was supposed to have been dropped from Wells, Fargo & Co.'s boxes by the robbers in their midnight flight through Blazing Star."

In the same journal appeared the no less important intelligence which explains while it completes this veracious chronicle.

"It is rumoured that a marriage is shortly to take place between the hero of the late treasure discovery and a young lady of Red Chief, whose devoted aid and assistance to this important work is well known to this community."

A Drift from Redwood Camp.

They had all known him as a shiftless, worthless creature. From the time he first entered Redwood Camp, carrying his entire effects in a red handkerchief on the end of a long-handled shovel, until he lazily drifted out of it on a plank in the terrible inundation of 1856, they never expected anything better of him. In a community of strong men with sullen virtues and dangerously fascinating vices, he was tolerated as possessing neither—not even rising by any dominant human weakness or ludicrous quality to the importance of a butt. In the *dramatis personæ* of Redwood Camp he was a simple "super"—who had only passive, speechless rôles in those fierce dramas that were sometimes unrolled beneath its green-curtained pines. Nameless and penniless, he was overlooked by the census and ignored by the tax-collector, while in a hotly-contested election for sheriff, when even the head-boards of the scant cemetery were consulted to fill the poll-lists, it was discovered that neither candidate had thought fit to avail himself of his actual vote. He was debarred the rude heraldry of a nickname of achievement, and in a camp made up of "Euchre Bills," "Poker Dicks," "Profane Pete," and "Snapshot Harry," was known vaguely as "him," "Skeesicks," or "that coot." It was remembered long after, with a feeling of superstition, that he had never even met with the dignity of an accident, nor received the fleeting honour of a chance shot meant for somebody else in any of the liberal and broadly comprehensive encounters which distinguished the camp. And the inundation that finally

carried him out of it was partly anticipated by his passive incompetency, for while the others escaped — or were drowned in escaping—he calmly floated off on his plank without an opposing effort.

For all that Elijah Martin—which was his real name—was far from being unamiable or repellent. That he was cowardly, untruthful, selfish, and lazy, was undoubtedly the fact; perhaps it was his peculiar misfortune that, just then, courage, frankness, generosity, and activity were the dominant factors in the life of Redwood Camp. His submissive gentleness, his unquestioned modesty, his half refinement, and his amiable exterior consequently availed him nothing against the fact that he was missed during a raid of the Digger Indians, and lied to account for it; or that he lost his right to a gold discovery by failing to make it good against a bully, and selfishly kept this discovery from the knowledge of the camp. Yet this weakness awakened no animosity in his companions, and it is probable that the indifference of the camp to his fate in this final catastrophe came purely from a simple forgetfulness of one who at that supreme moment was weakly incapable.

Such was the reputation and such the antecedents of the man who, on the 15th of March 1856, found himself adrift in a swollen tributary of the Minyo. A spring freshet of unusual volume had flooded the adjacent river until, bursting its bounds, it escaped through the narrow, wedge-shaped valley that held Redwood Camp. For a day and a night the surcharged river poured half its waters through the straggling camp. At the end of that time every vestige of the little settlement was swept away; all that was left was scattered far and wide in the country, caught in the hanging branches of water-side willows and alders, embayed in sluggish pools, dragged over submerged meadows, and one fragment—bearing up Elijah Martin—pursuing the devious courses of an unknown tributary fifty

miles away. Had he been a rash, impatient man, he would have been speedily drowned in some earlier desperate attempt to reach the shore; had he been an ordinarily bold man, he would have succeeded in transferring himself to the branches of some obstructing tree; but he was neither, and he clung to his broken raft-like berth with an endurance that was half the paralysis of terror and half the patience of habitual misfortune. Eventually he was caught in a side current, swept to the bank, and cast ashore on an unexplored wilderness.

His first consciousness was one of hunger, that usurped any sentiment of gratitude for his escape from drowning. As soon as his cramped limbs permitted, he crawled out of the bushes in search of food. He did not know where he was; there was no sign of habitation—or even occupation—anywhere. He had been too terrified to notice the direction in which he had drifted—even if he had possessed the ordinary knowledge of a backwoodsman, which he did not. He was helpless. In his bewildered state, seeing a squirrel cracking a nut on the branch of a hollow tree near him, he made a half-frenzied dart at the frightened animal, which ran away. But the same association of ideas in his torpid and confused brain impelled him to search for the squirrel's hoard in the hollow of the tree. He ate the few hazel-nuts he found there ravenously. The purely animal instinct satisfied, he seemed to have borrowed from it a certain animal strength and intuition. He limped through the thicket not unlike some awkward, shy quadrumane, stopping here and there to peer out through the openings over the marshes that lay beyond. His sight, hearing, and even the sense of smell had become preternaturally acute. It was the latter which suddenly arrested his steps with the odour of dried fish. It had a significance beyond the mere instincts of hunger—it indicated the contiguity of some Indian encampment. And as such—it meant danger, torture, and death.

He stopped, trembled violently, and tried to collect his scattered senses. Redwood Camp had embroiled itself needlessly and brutally with the surrounding Indians, and only held its own against them by reckless courage and unerring marksmanship. The frequent use of a casual wandering Indian as a target for the practising rifles of its members had kept up an undying hatred in the heart of the aborigines and stimulated them to terrible and isolated reprisals. The scalped and skinned dead body of Jack Trainer, tied on his horse and held hideously upright by a cross of wood behind his saddle, had passed, one night, a slow and ghastly apparition, into camp; the corpse of Dick Ryner had been found anchored on the river-bed, disembowelled and filled with stone and gravel. The solitary and unprotected member of Redwood Camp who fell into the enemy's hands was doomed.

Elijah Martin remembered this, but his fears gradually began to subside in a certain apathy of the imagination, which, perhaps, dulled his apprehensions and allowed the instinct of hunger to become again uppermost. He knew that the low bark tents, or wigwams, of the Indians were hung with strips of dried salmon, and his whole being was now centred upon an attempt to stealthily procure a delicious morsel. As yet he had distinguished no other sign of life or habitation; a few moments later, however, and grown bolder with an animal-like trustfulness in his momentary security, he crept out of the thicket and found himself near a long, low mound or burrow-like structure of mud and bark on the river-bank. A single narrow opening, not unlike the entrance of an Esquimaux hut, gave upon the river. Martin had no difficulty in recognising the character of the building. It was a "sweat-house," an institution common to nearly all the aboriginal tribes of California. Half a religious temple, it was also half a sanitary asylum, was used as a Russian bath or superheated vault, from which the braves, sweltering and

stifling all night, by smothered fires, at early dawn plunged, perspiring, into the ice-cold river. The heat and smoke were further utilised to dry and cure the long strips of fish hanging from the roof, and it was through the narrow aperture that served as a chimney that the odour escaped which Martin had detected. He knew that, as the bathers only occupied the house from midnight to early morn, it was now probably empty. He advanced confidently toward it.

He was a little surprised to find that the small open space between it and the river was occupied by a rude scaffolding, like that on which certain tribes exposed their dead, but in this instance it only contained the feathered leggings, fringed blanket, and eagle-plumed head-dress of some brave. He did not, however, linger in this plainly visible area, but quickly dropped on all-fours and crept into the interior of the house. Here he completed his feast with the fish, and warmed his chilled limbs on the embers of the still smouldering fires. It was while drying his tattered clothes and shoeless feet that he thought of the dead brave's useless leggings and moccasins, and it occurred to him that he would be less likely to attract the Indians' attention from a distance and provoke a ready arrow, if he were disguised as one of them. Crawling out again, he quickly secured, not only the leggings, but the blanket and head-dress, and putting them on, cast his own clothes into the stream. A bolder, more energetic, or more provident man would have followed the act by quickly making his way back to the thicket to reconnoitre, taking with him a supply of fish for future needs. But Elijah Martin succumbed again to the recklessness of inertia; he yielded once more to the animal instinct of momentary security. He returned to the interior of the hut, curled himself again on the ashes, and weakly resolving to sleep until moonrise, and as weakly hesitating, ended by falling into uneasy but helpless stupor.

When he awoke, the rising sun, almost level with the low entrance to the sweat-house, was darting its direct rays into the interior, as if searching it with fiery spears. He had slept ten hours. He rose tremblingly to his knees. Everything was quiet without; he might yet escape. He crawled to the opening. The open space before it was empty, but the scaffolding was gone. The clear, keen air revived him. As he sprang out, erect, a shout that nearly stunned him seemed to rise from the earth on all sides. He glanced around him in a helpless agony of fear. A dozen concentric circles of squatting Indians, whose heads were visible above the reeds, encompassed the banks around the sunken base of the sweat-house with successive dusky rings. Every avenue of escape seemed closed. Perhaps for that reason the attitude of his surrounding captors was passive rather than aggressive, and the shrewd, half-Hebraic profiles nearest him expressed only stoical waiting. There was a strange similarity of expression in his own immovable apathy of despair. His only sense of averting his fate was a confused idea of explaining his intrusion. His desperate memory yielded a few common Indian words. He pointed automatically to himself and the stream. His white lips moved.

"I come—from—the river!"

A guttural cry, as if the whole assembly were clearing their throats, went round the different circles. The nearest rocked themselves to and fro and bent their feathered heads toward him. A hollow-cheeked, decrepit old man arose and said, simply—

"It is he! The great chief has come!"

. . . . . .

He was saved. More than that, he was re-created. For, by signs and intimations he was quickly made aware that since the death of their late chief, their medicine-men had prophesied that his perfect successor should appear miraculously before them, borne noiselessly on the river

from the sea, in the plumes and insignia of his predecessor. This mere coincidence of appearance and costume might not have been convincing to the braves had not Elijah Martin's actual deficiencies contributed to their unquestioned faith in him. Not only his inert possession of the sweat-house and his apathetic attitude in their presence, but his utter and complete unlikeness to the white frontiersmen of their knowledge and tradition—creatures of fire and sword and malevolent activity—as well as his manifest dissimilarity to themselves, settled their conviction of his supernatural origin. His gentle, submissive voice, his yielding will, his lazy helplessness, the absence of strange weapons, and fierce explosives in his possession, his unwonted sobriety — all proved him an exception to his apparent race that was in itself miraculous. For it must be confessed that, in spite of the cherished theories of most romances and all statesmen and commanders, that *fear* is the great civiliser of the savage barbarian, and that he is supposed to regard the prowess of the white man and his mysterious death-dealing weapons as evidence of his supernatural origin and superior creation, the facts have generally pointed to the reverse. Elijah Martin was not long in discovering that when the Minyo hunter, with his obsolete bow, dropped dead by a bullet from a viewless and apparently noiseless space, it was *not* considered the lightnings of an avenging Deity, but was traced directly to the ambushed rifle of Kansas Joe, swayed by a viciousness quite as human as their own; the spectacle of Blizzard Dick, verging on *delirium tremens*, and riding "amuck" into an Indian village with a revolver in each hand, did *not* impress them as a supernatural act, nor excite their respectful awe as much as the less harmful frenzy of one of their own medicine-men; they were *not* influenced by implacable white gods, who relaxed only to drive hard bargains and exchange mildewed flour and shoddy blankets for their fish and furs. I am afraid

they regarded these raids of Christian civilisation as they looked upon grasshopper plagues, famines, inundations, and epidemics; while an utterly impassive God washed his hands of the means he had employed, and even encouraged the faithful to resist and overcome his emissaries —the white devils! Had Elijah Martin been a student of theology, he would have been struck with the singular resemblance of these theories—although the application thereof was reversed—to the Christian faith. But Elijah Martin had neither the imagination of a theologian nor the insight of a politician. He only saw that he, hitherto ignored and despised in a community of half-barbaric men, now translated to a community of men wholly savage, was respected and worshipped!

It might have turned a stronger head than Elijah's. He was at first frightened, fearful lest his reception concealed some hidden irony, or that, like the flower-crowned victim of ancient sacrifice, he was exalted and sustained to give importance and majesty to some impending martyrdom. Then he began to dread that his innocent deceit—if deceit it was—should be discovered; at last, partly from meekness and partly from the animal contentment of present security, he accepted the situation. Fortunately for him it was purely passive. The great chief of the Minyo tribe was simply an expressionless idol of flesh and blood. The previous incumbent of that office had been an old man, impotent and senseless of late years through age and disease. The chieftains and braves had consulted in council before him, and perfunctorily submitted their decisions, like offerings, to his unresponsive shrine. In the same way, all material events—expeditions, trophies, industries—were supposed to pass before the dull, impassive eyes of the great chief, for direct acceptance. On the second day of Elijah's accession, two of the braves brought a bleeding human scalp before him. Elijah turned pale, trembled, and

averted his head, and then, remembering the danger of giving way to his weakness, grew still more ghastly. The warriors watched him with impassioned faces. A grunt—but whether of astonishment, dissent, or approval, he could not tell—went round the circle. But the scalp was taken away and never again appeared in his presence.

An incident still more alarming quickly followed. Two captives, white men, securely bound, were one day brought before him on their way to the stake, followed by a crowd of old and young squaws and children. The unhappy Elijah recognised in the prisoners two packers from a distant settlement who sometimes passed through Redwood Camp. An agony of terror, shame, and remorse shook the pseudo-chief to his crest of high feathers, and blanched his face beneath its paint and yellow ochre. To interfere to save them from the torture they were evidently to receive at the hands of those squaws and children, according to custom, would be exposure and death to him as well as themselves; while to assist by his passive presence at the horrible sacrifice of his countrymen was too much for even his weak selfishness. Scarcely knowing what he did as the lugubrious procession passed before him, he hurriedly hid his face in his blanket and turned his back upon the scene. There was a dead silence. The warriors were evidently unprepared for this extraordinary conduct of their chief. What might have been their action it was impossible to conjecture, for at that moment a little squaw, perhaps impatient for the sport and partly emboldened by the fact that she had been selected, only a few days before, as the betrothed of the new chief, approached him slyly from the other side. The horrified eyes of Elijah, momentarily raised from his blanket, saw and recognised her. The feebleness of a weak nature, that dared not measure itself directly with the real cause, vented its rage on a secondary object. He darted a quick glance of indignation and hatred at the young girl. She ran back in startled terror to her

companions, a hurried consultation followed, and in another moment the whole bevy of girls, old women, and children were on the wing, shrieking and crying, to their wigwams.

"You see," said one of the prisoners coolly to the other in English, "I was right. They never intended to do anything to us. It was only a bluff. These Minyos are a different sort from the other tribes. They never kill anybody if they can help it."

"You're wrong," said the other excitedly. "It was that big chief there, with his head in a blanket, that sent those dogs to the rightabout. Hell! did you see them run at just a look from him? He's a high and mighty feller, you bet. Look at his dignity!"

"That's so—he ain't no slouch," said the other, gazing at Elijah's muffled head critically. "D——d if he ain't a born king."

The sudden conflict and utter revulsion of emotion that those simple words caused in Elijah's breast was almost incredible. He had been at first astounded by the revelation of the peaceful reputation of the unknown tribe he had been called upon to govern; but even this comforting assurance was as nothing compared to the greater revelations implied in the speaker's praise of himself. He, Elijah Martin! the despised, the rejected, the worthless outcast of Redwood Camp, recognised as a "born king," a leader; his power felt by the very men who had scorned him! And he had done nothing—stop! had he actually done *nothing?* Was it not possible that he was *really* what they thought him? His brain reeled under the strong, unaccustomed wine of praise; acting upon his weak selfishness, it exalted him for a moment to their measure of his strength, even as their former belief in his inefficiency had kept him down. Courage is too often only the memory of past success. This was his first effort; he forgot he had not earned it, even as he now ignored the danger of earning it. The few words of unconscious praise had fallen like the blade of

knighthood on his cowering shoulders; he had risen ennobled from the contact. Though his face was still muffled in his blanket, he stood erect and seemed to have gained in stature.

The braves had remained standing irresolute, and yet watchful, a few paces from their captives. Suddenly Elijah, still keeping his back to the prisoners, turned upon the braves with blazing eyes, violently throwing out his hands with the gesture of breaking bonds. Like all sudden demonstrations of undemonstrative men, it was extravagant, weird, and theatrical. But it was more potent than speech—the speech that, even if effective, would still have betrayed him to his countrymen. The braves hurriedly cut the thongs of the prisoners; another impulsive gesture from Elijah, and they, too, fled. When he lifted his eyes cautiously from his blanket, captors and captives had dispersed in opposite directions, and he was alone—and triumphant!

From that moment Elijah Martin was another man. He went to bed that night in an intoxicating dream of power; he arose a man of will, of strength. He read it in the eyes of the braves, albeit at times averted in wonder. He understood now, that although peace had been their habit and custom, they had nevertheless sought to test his theories of administration with the offering of the scalps and the captives, and in this detection of their common weakness he forgot his own. Most heroes require the contrast of the unheroic to set them off; and Elijah actually found himself devising means for strengthening the defensive and offensive character of the tribe, and was himself strengthened by it. Meanwhile the escaped packers did not fail to heighten the importance of their adventure by elevating the character and achievements of their deliverer; and it was presently announced throughout the frontier settlements that the hitherto insignificant and peaceful tribe of Minyos, who inhabited a large

territory bordering on the Pacific Ocean, had developed into a powerful nation, only kept from the war-path by a more powerful but mysterious chief. The Government sent an Indian agent to treat with them, in its usual half-paternal, half-aggressive, and wholly inconsistent policy. Elijah, who still retained the imitative sense and adaptability to surroundings which belong to most lazy, impressible natures, and in striped yellow and vermilion features looked the chief he personated, met the agent with silent and becoming gravity. The council was carried on by signs. Never before had an Indian treaty been entered into with such perfect knowledge of the intentions and designs of the whites by the Indians, and such profound ignorance of the qualities of the Indians by the whites. It need scarcely be said that the treaty was an unquestionable Indian success. They did not give up their arable lands; what they did sell to the agent they refused to exchange for extravagant-priced shoddy blankets, worthless guns, damp powder, and mouldy meal. They took pay in dollars, and were thus enabled to open more profitable commerce with the traders at the settlements for better goods and better bargains; they simply declined beads, whisky, and Bibles at any price. The result was that the traders found it profitable to protect them from their countrymen, and the chances of wantonly shooting down a possible valuable customer stopped the old indiscriminate rifle-practice. The Indians were allowed to cultivate their fields in peace. Elijah purchased for them a few agricultural implements. The catching, curing, and smoking of salmon became an important branch of trade. They waxed prosperous and rich; they lost their nomadic habits—a centralised settlement bearing the external signs of an Indian village took the place of their old temporary encampments, but the huts were internally an improvement on the old wigwams. The dried fish were banished from the tent-

poles to long sheds especially constructed for that purpose. The sweat-house was no longer utilised for worldly purposes. The wise and mighty Elijah did not attempt to reform their religion, but to preserve it in its integrity.

That these improvements and changes were due to the influence of one man was undoubtedly true, but that he was necessarily a superior man did not follow. Elijah's success was due partly to the fact that he had been enabled to impress certain negative virtues, which were part of his own nature, upon a community equally constituted to receive them. Each was strengthened by the recognition in each other of the unexpected value of those qualities; each acquired a confidence begotten of their success. "*He-hides-his-face,*" as Elijah Martin was known to the tribe after the episode of the released captives, was really not so much of an autocrat as many constitutional rulers.

. . . . . .

Two years of tranquil prosperity passed. Elijah Martin, foundling, outcast, without civilised ties or relationship of any kind, forgotten by his countrymen, and lifted into alien power, wealth, security, and respect, became—homesick!

It was near the close of a summer afternoon. He was sitting at the door of his lodge, which overlooked, on one side, the far-shining levels of the Pacific, and, on the other, the slow descent to the cultivated meadows and banks of the Minyo River, that debouched through a waste of salt-marsh, beach-grass, sand-dunes, and foamy estuary into the ocean. The headland, or promontory—the only eminence of the Minyo territory—had been reserved by him for his lodge, partly on account of its isolation from the village at its base, and partly for the view it commanded of his territory. Yet his wearying and discontented eyes were more often found on the ocean, as a possible highway of escape from his irksome

position, than on the plain and the distant range of mountains, so closely connected with the nearer past and his former detractors. In his vague longing he had no desire to return to them, even in triumph; in his present security there still lingered a doubt of his ability to cope with the old conditions. It was more like his easy, indolent nature—which revived in his prosperity—to trust to this least practical and remote solution of his trouble. His home-sickness was as vague as his plan for escape from it; he did not know exactly what he regretted, but it was probably some life he had not enjoyed, some pleasure that had escaped his former incompetency and poverty.

He had sat thus a hundred times, as aimlessly blinking at the vast possibilities of the shining sea beyond, turning his back upon the near and more practicable mountains, lulled by the far-off beating of monotonous rollers, the lonely cry of the curlew and plover, the drowsy changes of alternate breaths of cool, fragrant reeds and warm, spicy sands that blew across his eyelids, and succumbed to sleep, as he had done a hundred times before. The narrow strips of coloured cloth, insignia of his dignity, flapped lazily from his tent-poles, and at last seemed to slumber with him; the shadows of the leaf-tracery thrown by the bay-tree on the ground at his feet scarcely changed its pattern. Nothing moved but the round, restless, berry-like eyes of Wachita, his child-wife, the former heroine of the incident with the captive packers, who sat near her lord, armed with a willow wand, watchful of intruding wasps, sand-flies, and even the more ostentatious advances of a rotund and clerical-looking humble-bee, with his monotonous homily. Content, dumb, submissive, vacant, at such times, Wachita, debarred her husband's confidences through the native customs and his own indifferent taciturnity, satisfied herself by gazing at him with the wondering but ineffectual sympathy of a faithful dog. Unfortunately

for Elijah her purely mechanical ministration could not prevent a more dangerous intrusion upon his security.

He awoke with a light start, and eyes that gradually fixed upon the woman a look of returning consciousness. Wachita pointed timidly to the village below.

"The Messenger of the Great White Father has come to-day, with his waggons and horses; he would see the chief of the Minyos, but I would not disturb my lord."

Elijah's brow contracted. Relieved of its characteristic metaphor, he knew that this meant that the new Indian agent had made his usual official visit, and had exhibited the usual anxiety to see the famous chieftain.

"Good!" he said. "White Rabbit (his lieutenant) will see the messenger and exchange gifts. It is enough."

"The white messenger has brought his wangee (white) woman with him. They would look upon the face of him who hides it," continued Wachita dubiously. "They would that Wachita should bring them nearer to where my lord is, that they might see him when he knew it not."

Elijah glanced moodily at his wife, with the half suspicion with which he still regarded her alien character. "Then let Wachita go back to the squaws and old women, and let her hide herself with them until the wangee strangers are gone," he said curtly. "I have spoken. Go!"

Accustomed to these abrupt dismissals, which did not necessarily indicate displeasure, Wachita disappeared without a word. Elijah, who had risen, remained for a few moments leaning against the tent-poles, gazing abstractedly toward the sea. The bees droned uninterruptedly in his ears; the far-off roll of the breakers came to him distinctly; but suddenly, with greater distinctness, came the murmur of a woman's voice.

"He don't look savage a bit! Why, he's real handsome."

"Hush! you"—— said a second voice, in a frightened whisper.

"But if he *did* hear he couldn't understand," returned the first voice. A suppressed giggle followed.

Luckily, Elijah's natural and acquired habits of repression suited the emergency. He did not move, although he felt the quick blood fly to his face, and the voice of the first speaker had suffused him with a strange and delicious anticipation. He restrained himself, though the words she had naïvely dropped were filling him with new and tremulous suggestion. He was motionless, even while he felt that the vague longing and yearning which had possessed him hitherto was now mysteriously taking some unknown form and action.

The murmuring ceased. The humble-bee's drone again became ascendant—a sudden fear seized him. She was *going;* he should never see her! While he had stood there a dolt and sluggard, she had satisfied her curiosity and stolen away. With a sudden yielding to impulse, he darted quickly in the direction where he had heard her voice. The thicket moved, parted, crackled, and rustled, and then undulated thirty feet before him in a long wave, as if from the passage of some lithe, invisible figure. But at the same moment a little cry, half of alarm, half of laughter, broke from his very feet, and a bent manzanito-bush, relaxed by frightened fingers, flew back against his breast. Thrusting it hurriedly aside, his stooping, eager face came almost in contact with the pink, flushed cheeks and tangled curls of a woman's head. He was so near, her moist and laughing eyes almost drowned his eager glance; her parted lips and white teeth were so close to his that her quick breath took away his own.

She had dropped on one knee, as her companion fled, expecting he would overlook her as he passed, but his direct onset had extracted the feminine outcry. Yet even then she did not seem greatly frightened.

"It's only a joke, sir," she said, ignoring her late belief that he knew no English, but coolly lifting herself to her

feet, by grasping his arm. "I'm Mrs. Dall, the Indian agent's wife. They said you wouldn't let anybody see you —and *I* determined I would. That's all!" She stopped, threw back her tangled curls behind her ears, shook the briars and thorns from her skirt, and added: "Well, I reckon you aren't afraid of a woman, are you? So no harm's done. Good-bye!"

She drew slightly back as if to retreat, but the elasticity of the manzanito against which she was leaning threw her forward once more. He again inhaled the perfume of her hair; he saw even the tiny freckles that darkened her upper lip and brought out the moist, red curve below. A sudden recollection of a playmate of his vagabond childhood flashed across his mind; a wild inspiration of lawlessness, begotten of his past experience, his solitude, his dictatorial power, and the beauty of the woman before him, mounted to his brain. He threw his arms passionately around her, pressed his lips to hers, and with a half-hysterical laugh drew back and disappeared in the thicket.

Mrs. Dall remained for an instant dazed and stupefied. Then she lifted her arm mechanically, and with her sleeve wiped her bruised mouth and the ochre stain that his paint had left, like blood, upon her cheek. Her laughing face had become instantly grave, but not from fear; her dark eyes had clouded, but not entirely with indignation. She suddenly brought down her hand sharply against her side with a gesture of discovery. "That's no Injun!" she said, with prompt decision. The next minute she plunged back into the trail again, and the dense foliage once more closed around her. But as she did so the broad, vacant face and the mutely wondering eyes of Wachita rose, like a placid moon, between the branches of a tree where she had been hidden, and shone serenely and impassively after her.

. . . . . .

A month elapsed. But it was a month filled with more experience to Elijah than his past two years of exaltation. In the first few days following his meeting with Mrs. Dall, he was possessed by terror, mingled with flashes of desperation, at the remembrance of his rash imprudence. His recollection of extravagant frontier chivalry to womankind, and the swift retribution of the insulted husband or guardian, alternately filled him with abject fear or extravagant recklessness. At times prepared for flight, even to the desperate abandonment of himself in a canoe to the waters of the Pacific; at times he was on the point of inciting his braves to attack the Indian agency and precipitate the war that he felt would be inevitable. As the days passed, and there seemed to be no interruption to his friendly relations with the agency, with that relief a new, subtle joy crept into Elijah's heart. The image of the agent's wife framed in the leafy screen behind his lodge, the perfume of her hair and breath mingled with the spicing of the bay, the brief thrill and tantalisation of the stolen kiss still haunted him. Through his long, shy abstention from society, and his two years of solitary exile, the fresh beauty of this young Western wife, in whom the frank artlessness of girlhood still lingered, appeared to him like a superior creation. He forgot his vague longings in the inception of a more tangible but equally unpractical passion. He remembered her unconscious and spontaneous admiration of him; he dared to connect it with her forgiving silence. If she had withheld her confidences from her husband, he could hope—he knew not exactly what!

One afternoon Wachita put into his hand a folded note. With an instinctive presentiment of its contents, Elijah turned red and embarrassed in receiving it from the woman who was recognised as his wife. But the impassive, submissive manner of this household drudge, instead of touching his conscience, seemed to him a vulgar and brutal

acceptance of the situation that dulled whatever compunction he might have had. He opened the note and read hurriedly as follows:—

"You took a great freedom with me the other day, and I am justified in taking one with you now. I believe you understand English as well as I do. If you want to explain that, and your conduct to me, I will be at the same place this afternoon. My friend will accompany me, but she need not hear what you have to say."

Elijah read the letter, which might have been written by an ordinary school-girl, as if it had conveyed the veiled rendezvous of a princess. The reserve, caution, and shyness which had been the safeguard of his weak nature were swamped in a flow of immature passion. He flew to the interview with the eagerness and inexperience of first love. He was completely at her mercy. So utterly was he subjugated by her presence that she did not even run the risk of his passion. Whatever sentiment might have mingled with her curiosity, she was never conscious of a necessity to guard herself against it. At this second meeting she was in full possession of his secret. He had told her everything; she had promised nothing in return—she had not even accepted anything. Even her actual after-relations to the *dénouement* of his passion are still shrouded in mystery.

Nevertheless, Elijah lived two weeks on the unsubstantial memory of this meeting. What might have followed could not be known, for at the end of that time an outrage—so atrocious that even the peaceful Minyos were thrilled with savage indignation—was committed on the outskirts of the village. An old chief, who had been specially selected to deal with the Indian agent, and who kept a small trading outpost, had been killed and his goods despoiled by a reckless Redwood packer. The murderer had coolly said that he was only "serving out" the tool

of a fraudulent imposture on the Government, and that he dared the arch-impostor himself, the so-called Minyo chief, to help himself. A wave of ungovernable fury surged up to the very tent-poles of Elijah's lodge and demanded vengeance. Elijah trembled and hesitated. In the thraldom of his selfish passion for Mrs. Dall he dared not contemplate a collision with her countrymen. He would have again sought refuge in his passive, non-committal attitude, but he knew the impersonal character of Indian retribution and compensation—a sacrifice of equal value, without reference to the culpability of the victim — and he dreaded some spontaneous outbreak. To prevent the enforced expiation of the crime by some innocent brother packer, he was obliged to give orders for the pursuit and arrest of the criminal, secretly hoping for his escape or the interposition of some circumstance to avert his punishment. A day of sullen expectancy to the old men and squaws in camp, of gloomy anxiety to Elijah alone in his lodge, followed the departure of the braves on the war-path. It was midnight when they returned. Elijah, who from his habitual reserve and the accepted etiquette of his exalted station had remained impassive in his tent, only knew from the guttural rejoicings of the squaws that the expedition had been successful and the captive was in their hands. At any other time he might have thought it an evidence of some growing scepticism of his infallibility of judgment and a diminution of respect that they did not confront him with their prisoner. But he was too glad to escape from the danger of exposure and possible arraignment of his past life by the desperate captive, even though it might not have been understood by the spectators. He reflected that the omission might have arisen from their recollection of his previous aversion to a retaliation on other prisoners. Enough that they would wait his signal for the torture and execution at sunrise the next day.

The night passed slowly. It is more than probable that the selfish and ignoble torments of the sleepless and vacillating judge were greater than those of the prisoner who dozed at the stake between his curses. Yet it was part of Elijah's fatal weakness that his kinder and more human instincts were dominated even at that moment by his lawless passion for the Indian agent's wife, and his indecision as to the fate of his captive was equally due to his preoccupation and a selfish consideration of her possible relations to the result. He hated the prisoner for his infelicitous and untimely crime, yet he could not make up his mind to his death. He paced the ground before his lodge in dishonourable incertitude. The small eyes of the submissive Wachita watched him with vague solicitude.

Towards morning he was struck by a shameful inspiration. He would creep unperceived to the victim's side, unloose his bonds, and bid him fly to the Indian agency! There he was to inform Mrs. Dall that her husband's safety depended upon his absenting himself for a few days, but that she was to remain and communicate with Elijah. She would understand everything, perhaps; at least she would know that the prisoner's release was to please her, and even if she did not, no harm would be done, a white man's life would be saved, and his real motive would not be suspected. He turned with feverish eagerness to the lodge. Wachita had disappeared—probably to join the other women. It was well; she would not suspect him.

The tree to which the doomed man was bound was, by custom, selected nearest the chief's lodge, within its sacred enclosure, with no other protection than that offered by its reserved seclusion and the outer semicircle of warriors' tents before it. To escape, the captive would therefore have to pass beside the chief's lodge to the rear and descend the hill towards the shore. Elijah would show him the way, and make it appear as if he had escaped unaided. As he glided into the shadow of a group of pines, he could dimly

discern the outline of the destined victim, secured against one of the larger trees in a sitting posture, with his head fallen forward on his breast as if in sleep. But at the same moment another figure glided out from the shadow and approached the fatal tree. It was Wachita!

He stopped in amazement. But in another instant a flash of intelligence made it clear to him. He remembered her vague uneasiness and solicitude at his agitation and her sudden disappearance; she had fathomed his perplexity, as she had once before! Of her own accord she was going to release the prisoner! The knife to cut his cords glittered in her hand. Brave and faithful animal!

He held his breath as he drew nearer. But, to his horror, the knife suddenly flashed in the air and darted down, again and again, upon the body of the helpless man. There was a convulsive struggle, but no outcry, and the next moment the body hung limp and inert in its cords. Elijah would himself have fallen, half fainting, against a tree, but by a revulsion of feeling, came the quick revelation that the desperate girl had rightly solved the problem! She had done what *he* ought to have done—and his loyalty and manhood were preserved. That conviction and the courage to act upon it—to have called the sleeping braves to witness his sacrifice—would have saved him, but—it was ordered otherwise!

As the girl rapidly passed him he threw out his hand and seized her wrist. "What did you do this for?" he demanded.

"For you," she said stupidly.

"And why?"

"Because you no kill him—you love his squaw."

"*His* squaw!" He staggered back. A terrible suspicion flashed upon him. He dashed Wachita aside and ran to the tree. It was the body of the Indian agent!

Aboriginal justice had been satisfied. The warriors had not caught the *murderer*, but, true to their idea of vicarious

retribution, they had determined upon the expiatory sacrifice of a life as valuable and innocent as the one they had lost, and had carried off the unfortunate representative of the Government.

"So the Gov'rment hev at last woke up and wiped out them cussed Digger Minyos," said Snapshot Harry, three months later, as he laid down the newspaper, in the brand-new saloon of the brand-new town of Redwood. "I see they've stampeded both banks of the Minyo River, and sent off a lot to the reservation. I reckon the soldiers at Fort Cass got sick o' sentiment after those hounds killed the Injun agent, and are beginning to agree with us that the only 'good Injun' is a dead one."

"And it turns out that that wonderful chief, that them two packers used to rave about, woz about as big a devil ez any, and tried to run off with the agent's wife, only the warriors killed her. I'd like to know what become of him. Some says he was killed, others allow that he got away. I've heerd tell that he was originally some kind of Methodist preacher!—a kind o' saint that got a sort o' spiritooal holt on the old squaws and children."

"Why don't you ask old Skeesicks? I see he's back here ag'in—and grubbin' along at a dollar a day on tailin's He's been somewhere up north, they say."

"What, Skeesicks? That shiftless, o'n'ry cuss! You bet he wusn't anywhere where there was danger or fighting. Why, you might as well hev suspected *him* of being the big chief himself! There he comes—ask him."

And the laughter was so general that Elijah Martin—*alias* Skeesicks—lounging shyly into the bar-room, joined in it weakly.

A Gentleman of La Porte.

He was also a pioneer. A party who broke through the snows of the winter of '51, and came upon the triangular little valley afterwards known as La Porte, found him the sole inhabitant. He had subsisted for three months on two biscuits a day and a few inches of bacon, in a hut made of bark and brushwood. Yet, when the explorers found him, he was quite alert, hopeful, and gentlemanly. But I cheerfully make way here for the terser narrative of Captain Henry Symes, commanding the prospecting party:—"We kem upon him, gentlemen, suddent-like, jest abreast of a rock like this"—demonstrating the distance—"ez near ez you be. He sees us, and he dives into his cabin and comes out agin with a *tall hat*—a stovepipe, gentlemen—and, blank me! gloves! He was a tall thin feller, holler in the cheek—ez might be—and off colour in his face, ez was nat'ral, takin' in account his starvation grub. But he lifts his hat to us so, and sez he, 'Happy to make your acquaintance, gentlemen! I'm afraid you ex-per-ienced some difficulty in getting here. Take a cigyar.' And he pulls out a fancy cigar-case with two real Havannas in it. 'I wish there was more,' sez he.

"'Ye don't smoke yourself?' sez I.

"'Seldom,' sez he; which war a lie, for that very arternoon I seed him hangin' ontu a short pipe like a suckin' baby ontu a bottle. 'I kept these cigyars for any gentleman that might drop in.'

"'I reckon ye see a great deal o' the best society yer,' sez Bill Parker, starin' at the hat and gloves and winkin' at the boys.

"'A few Ind-i-ans occasionally,' sez he.

"'Injins!' sez we.

"'Yes. Very quiet good fellows in their way. They have once or twice brought me game, which I refused, as the poor fellows have had a pretty hard time of it themselves.'

"Now, gentlemen, we was, ez you know, rather quiet men —rather peaceable men; but—hevin' been shot at three times by these yar 'good' Injins, and Parker hisself havin' a matter o' three inches of his own skelp lying loose in their hands and he walkin' round wearin' green leaves on his head like a Roman statoo—it *did* kinder seem ez if this yer stranger was playin' it rather low down on the boys. Bill Parker gets up and takes a survey o' him, and sez he, peaceful-like—

"'Ye say these yer Injins—these yer *quiet* Injins—offered yer game?'

"'They did!' sez he.

"'And you refoosed?'

"'I did,' sez he.

"'Must hev made 'em feel kinder bad—sorter tortered their sensitiv' naters?' sez Bill.

"'They really seemed quite disappointed.'

"'In course,' sez Bill. 'And now mout I ask who you be?'

"'Excuse me,' says the stranger; and, darn my skin! if he doesn't hist out a keerd-case, and, handin' it over to Bill, sez, 'Here's my kyard.'

"Bill took it and read out aloud, 'J. Trott, Kentucky.'

"'It's a pooty keerd,' sez Bill.

"'I'm glad you like it,' says the stranger.

"'I reckon the other fifty-one of the deck ez as pooty— all of 'em Jacks and left bowers,' sez Bill.

"The stranger sez nothin', but kinder draws back from Bill; but Bill ups and sez—

"'Wot is your little game, Mister J. Trott, of Kentucky?'

"'I don't think I quite understand you,' sez the stranger, a holler fire comin' intu his cheeks like ez if they was the bowl of a pipe.

"'Wot's this yer kid-glove business?—this yer tall hat paradin'?—this yer circus foolin'? Wot's it all about? *Who* are ye, anyway?'

"The stranger stands up and sez he, 'Ez I don't quarrel with guests on my own land,' sez he, 'I think you'll allow I'm—a gentleman!' sez he.

"With that he takes off his tall hat and makes a low bow, so, and turns away—like this; but Bill lites out of a suddent with his right foot and drives his No. 10 boot clean through the crown of that tall hat like one o' them circus hoops.

"That's about ez fur ez I remember. Gentlemen! thar warn't but *one* man o' that hull crowd ez could actooally swear what happened next, and that man never told. For a kind o' whirlwind jest then took place in that valley. I disremember anythin' but dust and bustlin'. Thar wasn't no yellin', thar wasn't no shootin'. It was one o' them suddent things that left even a six-shooter out in the cold. When I kem to in the *chapparel*—being oncomfortable like from hevin' only half a shirt on—I found nigh on three pounds o' gravel and stones in my pockets and a stiffness in my ha'r. I looks up and sees Bill hangin' in the forks of a hickory saplin' twenty feet above me.

"'Cap,' sez he, in an inquirin' way, 'hez the tornado passed?'

"'Which?' sez I.

"'This yer elemental disturbance—is it over?'

"'I reckon,' sez I.

"'Because,' sez he, 'afore this yer electrical phenomenon

took place I hed a slight misunderstanding with a stranger, and I'd like to apologise!'

"And with that he climbs down, peaceful like, and goes into the shanty, and comes out, hand in hand with that stranger, smilin' like an infant. And that's the first time, I reckon, we know'd anythin' about the gentleman of La Porte."

It is by no means improbable that the above incidents are slightly exaggerated in narration, and the cautious reader will do well to accept with some reservation the particular phenomenon alluded to by the Captain. But the fact remains that the Gentleman of La Porte was allowed an eccentricity and enjoyed an immunity from contemporaneous criticism only to be attributed to his personal prowess. Indeed, this was once publicly expressed. "It 'pears to me," said a meek new-comer—who, on the strength of his having received news of the death of a distant relative in the "States" had mounted an exceedingly large crape mourning band on his white felt hat, and was consequently obliged to "treat" the crowd in the bar-room of Parker's Hotel—"it 'pears to me, gentlemen, that this yer taxing the nat'ral expression of grief, and allowin' such festive exhibitions as yaller kid-gloves, on the gentleman on my right, is sorter inconsistent. I don't mind treatin' the crowd, gentlemen, but this yer platform and resolutions don't seem to keep step." This appeal to the *Demos* of every American crowd of course precluded any reply from the Gentleman of La Porte, but left it to the palpable chairman—the barkeeper, Mr. William Parker.

"Young man," he replied severely, "*when* you can wear yaller kids like *that* man and make 'em hover in the air like summer lightnin', and strike in four places to onct! then ye kin talk! *Then* ye kin wear your shirt half-masted if ye like!" A sentiment to which the crowd assenting, the meek man paid for the drinks, and would have, in addition, taken off his mourning band, but was courteously stopped by the Gentleman of La Porte.

And yet, I protest, there was little suggestive of this baleful prowess in his face and figure. He was loose-jointed and long-limbed, yet with a certain mechanical, slow rigidity of movement that seemed incompatible with alacrity and dexterity. His arms were unusually long, and his hands hung with their palms forward. In walking his feet "toed in," suggesting an aboriginal ancestry. His face, as I remember it, was equally inoffensive. Thin and melancholy, the rare smile that lit it up was only a courteous reception of some attribute of humour in another which he was unable himself to appreciate. His straight black hair and high cheekbones would have heightened his Indian resemblance; but these were offset by two most extraordinary eyes that were utterly at variance with this or indeed any other suggestion of his features. They were yellowish-blue, globular, and placidly staring. They expressed nothing that the Gentleman of La Porte thought —nothing that he did—nothing that he might reasonably be expected to do. They were at variance with his speech, his carriage, even his remarkable attire. More than one irreverent critic had suggested that he had probably lost his own eyes in some frontier difficulty, and had hurriedly replaced them with those of his antagonist.

Had this ingenious hypothesis reached the ears of the Gentleman, he would probably have contented himself with a simple denial of the fact, overlooking any humorous incongruity of statement. For, as has been already intimated, among his other privileges he enjoyed an absolute immunity from any embarrassing sense of the ludicrous. His deficient sense of humour and habitual gravity in a community whose severest dramatic episodes were mitigated by some humorous detail, and whose customary relaxation was the playing of practical jokes, was marked with a certain frankness that was discomposing. "I think," he remarked to a well-known citizen of La Porte, "that, in alluding to the argumentative character of Mr. William Peg-

hammer, you said you had found him lying awake at night contradicting the 'Katydids.' This he himself assures me is not true, and I may add that I passed the night with him in the woods without any such thing occurring You seemed to have *lied.*" The severity of this reception checked further humorous exhibitions in his presence. Indeed, I am not certain but it invested him with a certain aristocratic isolation.

Thus identified with the earliest history of the Camp, Mr. Trott participated in its fortunes and shared its prosperity. As one of the original locators of the "Eagle Mine" he enjoyed a certain income which enabled him to live without labour and to freely indulge his few and inexpensive tastes. After his own personal adornment—which consisted chiefly in the daily wearing of spotless linen—he was fond of giving presents. These possessed, perhaps, a sentimental rather than intrinsic value. To an intimate friend he had once given a cane, the stick whereof was cut from a wild grape-vine which grew above the spot where the famous "Eagle *lead*" was first discovered in La Porte; the head originally belonged to a cane presented to Mr. Trott's father, and the ferrule was made of the last silver half-dollar which he had brought to California. "And yet, do you know," said the indignant recipient of this touching gift, "I offered to put it down for a five-dollar ante last night over at Robinson's, and the boys wouldn't see it, and allowed I'd better leave the board. Thar's no appreciation of sacred things in this yer Camp."

It was in this lush growth and spring time of La Porte that the Gentleman was chosen Justice of the Peace by the unanimous voice of his fellow-citizens. That he should have exercised his functions with dignity was natural; that he should have shown a singular lenity in the levyings of fines and the infliction of penalties was, however, an unexpected and discomposing discovery to the settlement.

"The law requires me, sir," he would say to some unmistakable culprit, "to give you the option of ten days' imprisonment or the fine of ten dollars. If you have not the money with you, the clerk will doubtless advance it for you." It is needless to add that the clerk invariably advanced the money, or that when the Court adjourned the Judge instantly reimbursed him. In one instance only did the sturdy culprit—either from "pure cussedness" or a weaker desire to spare the Judge the expense of his conviction—*refuse* to borrow the amount of the fine from the clerk. He was accordingly remanded to the County Gaol. It is related—on tolerably good authority—that when the Court had adjourned the Court was seen, in spotless linen and yellow gloves, making in the direction of the County Gaol—a small *adobe* building, which also served as a Hall of Records. That, after ostentatiously consulting certain records, the Court entered the Gaol as if in casual official inspection. That, later in the evening, the Deputy Sheriff having charge of the prisoner was despatched for a bottle of whisky and a pack of cards. But as the story here alleges that the Deputy, that evening, lost the amount of his month's stipend and the Court its entire yearly salary to the prisoner in a friendly game of "cut-throat euchre," to relieve the tedium of the prisoner's confinement, the whole story has been denied, as incompatible with Judge Trott's dignity, though not inconsistent with his kindliness of nature. It is certain, however, that his lenity would have brought him into disfavour, but for a redeeming exhibition of his unofficial strength. A young and talented lawyer from Sacramento had been retained in some civil case before Judge Trott, but, confident of his success on appeal from this primitive tribunal, he had scarcely concealed his contempt for it in his closing argument. Judge Trott, when he had finished, sat unmoved, save for a slight colouring of his high cheek-bones. But here I must again borrow the graphic language of a

spectator: "When the Judge had hung out them ar red danger signals he sez, quite peaceful like, to that yer Sacramento shrimp, sez he, 'Young gentleman,' sez he, 'do you know that I could fine ye fifty dollars for contempt o' Court?' 'And if ye could,' sez the shrimp, peart and sassy as a hossfly, 'I reckon I could pay it.' 'But I ought to add,' sez the Gentleman, sad-like, 'that I don't purpose to do it. I believe in freedom of speech and—action!' He then rises up, onlimbers hisself, so to speak, stretches out that yer Hand o' Providence o' his, lites into that yer shrimp, lifts him up and scoots him through the window twenty feet into the ditch. 'Call the next case,' sez he, sittin' down again, with them big white eyes o' his looking peaceful like ez if nothing partikler had happened."

Happy would it have been for the Gentleman had these gentle eccentricities produced no greater result. But a fatal and hitherto unexpected weakness manifested itself in the very court in which he had triumphed, and for a time imperilled his popularity. A lady of dangerous antecedents and great freedom of manner, who was the presiding goddess of the "Wheel of Fortune" in the principal gambling-saloon of La Porte, brought an action against several of its able-bodied citizens for entering the saloon with "force and arms" and destroying the peculiar machinery of her game. She was ably supported by counsel, and warmly sympathised with by a gentleman who was not her husband. Yet in spite of this valuable co-operation she was not successful. The offence was clearly proved; but the jury gave a verdict in favour of the *defendants*, without leaving their seats. Judge Trott turned his mild inoffensive eyes upon them.

"Do I understand you to say that this is your final verdict?"

"You kin bet your boots, your Honour," responded the foreman with cheerful but well-meaning irreverence, "that that's about the way the thing points."

"Mr. Clerk," said Judge Trott, "record the verdict, and then enter my resignation as Judge of this Court."

He rose and left the bench. In vain did various influential citizens follow him with expostulations; in vain did they point out the worthlessness of the plaintiff and the worthlessness of her cause—in which he had sacrificed himself. In vain did the jury intimate that his resignation was an insult to *them*. Judge Trott turned abruptly upon the foreman, with the old ominous glow in his high cheek-bones.

"I didn't understand you," said he.

"I was saying," said the foreman hastily, "that it was useless to argue the case any longer," and withdrew slightly in advance of the rest of the jury, as became his official position. But Judge Trott never again ascended the bench.

It was quite a month after his resignation, and the Gentleman was sitting in the twilight "under the shadow of his own vine and fig-tree"—a figure of speech locally interpreted as a "giant redwood" and a mossy creeper—before the door of that cabin in which he was first introduced to the reader—when he was faintly conscious of the outlines of a female form and the tones of a female voice. The Gentleman hesitated, and placed over his right eye a large gold eyeglass, which had been lately accepted by the Camp as his most recent fashionable folly. The form was unfamiliar, but the voice the Gentleman instantly recognised as belonging to the plaintiff in his late momentous judicial experience. It is proper to say here that it was the voice of Mademoiselle Clotilde Montmorency; it is only just to add that, speaking no French, and being of unmistakable Anglo-Saxon origin, her name was evidently derived from the game over which she had presided, which was, in the baleful estimation of the Camp, of foreign extraction.

"I wanted to know," said Miss Clotilde, sitting down

on a bench beside the Gentleman—"that is, me and Jake Woods thought we'd like to know—*how much* you consider yourself out of pocket by this yer resignation of yours?"

Scarcely hearing the speech, and more concerned with the apparition itself, Judge Trott stammered vaguely, "I have the pleasure of addressing Miss"——

"If you mean by that that you think you don't know me, never saw me before, and don't want to see me agin, why, I reckon that's the polite way o' putting it," said Miss Montmorency, with enforced calmness, scraping some dead leaves together with the tip of her parasol as if she were covering up her emotions. "But I'm Miss Montmorency. I was saying that Jake and me thought that—seein' as you stood by us when them hounds on the jury give in their hellish lying verdict—Jake and me thought it wasn't the square thing for you to lose your situation just for me. 'Find out from the Judge,' sez he, 'jist what he reckons he's lost by this yer resignation—putting it at his own figgers.' That's what Jake said. Jake's a square man—I kin say *that* of him, anyhow."

"I don't think I understand you," said Judge Trott simply.

"That's it! that's just it!" continued Miss Clotilde, with only half-suppressed bitterness. "That's what I told Jake. I sez, 'The Judge won't understand you nor me. He's that proud he won't have anything to say to us. Didn't he meet me square on the street last Tuesday and never let on that he saw me—never even nodded when I nodded to him?'"

"My dear madam," said Judge Trott hurriedly, "I assure you you are mistaken. I did *not* see you. Pray believe me. The fact is—I am afraid to confess it even to myself—but I find that, day by day, my eyesight is growing weaker and weaker." He stopped and sighed. Miss Montmorency, glancing upward at his face, saw it

was pale and agitated. With a woman's swift intuition, she believed this weakness explained the otherwise gratuitous effrontery of his incongruous eyes, and it was to her a sufficient apology. It is only the inexplicable in a man's ugliness that a woman never pardons.

"Then ye really don't recognise me?" said Miss Clotilde, a little softened, and yet a little uneasy.

"I—am—afraid—not," said Trott, with an apologetic smile.

Miss Clotilde paused. "Do you mean to say you couldn't see me when I was in court during the trial?"

Judge Trott blushed. "I'm afraid I saw only—an—outline."

"I had on," continued Miss Clotilde rapidly, "a straw hat, with magenta silk lining, turned up so—magenta ribbons tied here"—(indicating her round throat)—"a reg'lar 'Frisco hat—don't you remember?"

"I—that is—I am afraid"——

"And one of them figgered silk 'Dollar Vardens,'" continued Miss Clotilde anxiously.

Judge Trott smiled politely, but vaguely. Miss Clotilde saw that he evidently had not recognised this rare and becoming costume. She scattered the leaves again and dug her parasol into the ground.

"Then, you never saw me at all?"

"Never distinctly."

"Ef it's a fair question betwixt you and me," she said suddenly, "what made you resign?"

"I could not remain Judge of a Court that was obliged to record a verdict so unjust as that given by the jury in your case," replied Judge Trott warmly.

"Say that agin, old man," said Miss Clotilde, with an admiration which half apologised for the irreverence of epithet.

Judge Trott urbanely repeated the substance of his remark in another form.

Miss Montmorency was silent a moment. "Then, it wasn't *me?*" she said finally.

"I don't think I catch your meaning," replied the Judge, a little awkwardly.

"Why—ME. It wasn't on account of *me* you did it?"

"No," said the Judge pleasantly.

There was another pause. Miss Montmorency balanced her parasol on the tip of her toe. "Well," she said finally, "this isn't getting much information for Jake."

"For whom?"

"Jake."

"Oh—your husband?"

Miss Montmorency clicked the snap of her bracelet smartly on her wrist and said sharply, "Who said he was 'my husband?'"

"Oh, I beg your pardon."

"I said Jake Woods. He's a square man—I can say *that* for him. He sez to me, 'You kin tell the Judge that whatever he chooses to take from us—it ain't no bribery nor corruption, nor nothing o' that kind. It's all on the square. The trial's over; he isn't Judge any longer; he can't do anything for us—he ain't expected to do anything for us but one thing. And that is to give us the satisfaction of knowing that he hasn't lost anything by us—that he hasn't lost anything by being a square man and acting on the square.' There! that's what he said. I've said it! Of course I know what *you'll* say. I know you'll get wrathy. I know you're mad now! I know you're too proud to touch a dollar from the like of us—if you were starving. I know you'll tell Jake to go to hell, and me with him! And who the hell cares?"

She had worked herself up to this passion so suddenly, so outrageously and inconsistently, that it was not strange that it ended in an hysterical burst of equally illogical tears. She sank down again on the bench she had gradually risen from, and applied the backs of her yellow-gloved hands to

her eyes, still holding the parasol at a rigid angle with her face. To her infinite astonishment Judge Trott laid one hand gently upon her shoulder and with the other possessed himself of the awkward parasol, which he tactfully laid on the bench beside her.

"You are mistaken, my dear young lady," he said, with a respectful gravity, "deeply mistaken, if you think I feel anything but kindness and gratitude for your offer—an offer so kind and unusual that even you yourself feel that I could not accept it. No! Let me believe that in doing what I thought was only my duty as a *Judge* I gained your good will, and let me feel that in doing my duty now as a *man* I shall still keep it."

Miss Clotilde had lifted her face towards his, as if deeply and wonderingly following his earnest words. But she only said, "Can you see me in this light? At this distance? Put up your glass and try."

Her face was not far from his. I have forgotten whether I have said that she was a pretty woman. She had been once prettier. But she retained enough of her good looks to invest the "Wheel of Fortune," over which she had presided, with a certain seductive and bewildering uncertainty, which increased the risk of the players. It was, in fact, this unhallowed combination of Beauty and Chance that excited the ire of La Porte—who deemed it unprofessional and not "on the square."

She had fine eyes. Possibly Judge Trott had never before been so near eyes that were so fine and so—expressive. He lifted his head with some embarrassment and a blush on his high cheekbones. Then, partly from instinctive courtesy, partly from a desire to bring in a third party to relieve his embarrassment, he said—

"I hope you will make your friend, Mr.——, understand that I appreciate his kindness, even if I can't accept it."

"Oh, you mean Jake," said the lady. "Oh, *he's* gone home to the States. I'll make it all right with *him!*"

There was another embarrassing pause—possibly over the absence of Jake. At last it was broken by Miss Montmorency. "You must take care of your eyes, for I want you to know me the next time you see me."

So they parted. The Judge *did* recognise her on several other occasions. And then La Porte was stirred to its depths in hillside and tunnel with a strange rumour. Judge Trott had married Miss Jane Thomson, *alias* Miss Clotilde Montmorency—in San Francisco! For a few hours a storm of indignation and rage swept over the town; it was believed to have been a deep-laid plan and conspiracy. It was perfectly well understood that Judge Trott's resignation was the price of her hand—and of the small fortune she was known to be possessed of. Of his character nothing remained that was assailable. A factitious interest and pathos was imported into the character and condition of her last lover—Jake Woods—the victim of the double treachery of Judge Trott and Miss Clotilde. A committee was formed to write a letter of sympathy to this man, who, a few months before, had barely escaped lynching at their hands. The angry discussion was at last broken by the voice of the first speaker in this veracious narrative, Captain Henry Symes—

"Thar's one feature in this yer case that ye don't seem to know and oughter be considered. The day she married him in San Francisco she had just come from the doctor's, who had told her that Trott was *helplessly blind!* Gentlemen, when a gal like that throws over her whole life, her whole perfession, and a square man like Jake Woods, to marry a blind man without a dollar—just because he once stood up for her—*on principle*, damn me ef I see any man good enough to go back on her for it! Ef the Judge is willing to kinder overlook little

bygone eccentricities o' hers for the sake o' being cared for and looked arter by her, that's *his* look out! And you'll excoose me if, arter my experience, I reckon it ain't exactly a healthy business to interfere with the domestic concerns of the Gentleman of La Porte."

THE END.

PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

Fine schedule: 25 cents on first day overdue
50 cents on fourth day overdue
One dollar on seventh day overdue.

OCT 8 1947

MAY 4 1948

LIBRARY USE

JUL 1950

SEP 11 1950

11Dec'51LU

26Nov'52SS

NOV 12 1952 LU

22Mar'58PF

REC'D LD

MAR 11 1958

11Apr'60GB

REC'D LD

MAR 28 1960

30Nov'62ZF

REC'D LD

NOV 20 1962

LD 21-100m-12,'46(A2012s16)4120

4689
v. 6

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY